

# *News Gathering and News Writing*

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# NEWS GATHERING AND NEWS WRITING

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BY

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NEW YORK: 1940  
PRENTICE-HALL, INC.

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*TO THE MEMORY OF R. W. N.*



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## INTRODUCTION

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**T**HIS BOOK has a highly particularized slant and two equally well-defined procedures.

The slant is that of viewing news gathering and news writing as related directly, even exclusively, to the young reporter freshly started upon his first job. His first 10 or 12 months on a staff are likely to do more than will any later period in his career in molding him into a superior newspaper worker or stranding him upon the sandbars of mediocrity. A textbook that answers the questions he will ask and views problems as he will view them during those important first months should be helpful.

The first procedure is to present news writing as a problem in interesting readers and to show how stories can be made so inviting that they will be read eagerly. The newspaper does not receive the attentive and deliberate reading given the smooth-paper magazine or the glazed-paper book. It is skimmed rather than studied. Stories may be accurate and complete, but they will not be read unless they are vigorously interesting. To this end, the book attempts to show reader psychology and to indicate how that psychology can be met.

The second procedure is to suggest, time and time again, ways whereby the new reporter can transmute his enthusiasm and energy into work that will bring him the favorable notice of the newspaper's executives. Every youngster knows that he could prove himself a star man if only the "big stories" came his way. To wait for them to do so is to trust entirely too much to the whims and fancies of luck. The book tries to point out how the reporter can "make his own luck," so far as that happy process is possible.

Handling "heavy" news, such as city government affairs, and controversial information is emphasized. A reporter who can put even a trifle of sparkle into the monthly report of the sealer of weights and measures demonstrates his quality, and one who can write safely about moot issues without diluting his stories into dishwater has a valuable skill. In both these enterprises the book attempts to show what demands readers make upon the newspaper. Here, as throughout the volume, the discussion centers upon "Why?" The reasons that validate a practice or a method are treated at length.

Illustrations and examples have been worked directly into the text, instead of being segregated as chapter aftermaths. Illustrative reading is too easy to skip if it is "fenced off."

In style, the book aims to be chatty and conversational. Newspapering is too much fun to be preceded by an over-formal textbook. Emphatically this does not mean that the book views reporting as a "game." Without reservation, the book holds that reporting is a professional work and must be so regarded if the reporter is to be more than a routine gatherer and writer of news.

The author acknowledges with pleasure the assistance given by two men now actively engaged in newspapering. Walter J. Pfister, city editor of the Sheboygan, Wisconsin, Press, made available for Chapter 5 a news executive's views about young reporters and their hopes for advancement. Gordon Sabine, a reporter for the Wisconsin State Journal, reviewed many of the chapters and contributed excellent suggestions for their improvement. And to Helen S. Neal, the author's wife, most active thanks are due for taking over the burdensome work of building the index.

The press of the United States never was more important to the nation's welfare than it is in these critical times. If this book helps infuse tomorrow's reporters with a realization of the high emprise and responsibility of their work, the author will be completely satisfied.

R. M. N.

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NEWS GATHERING  
AND  
NEWS WRITING

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# 1

## THE CUB

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### THE RECRUIT'S FIRST JOB

“ER—I'M BENNETT,” the cub announces, balancing alternately on right foot and then on left, and hoping that he looks much steadier than he feels.

The city editor glances up. “Oh yes,” he murmurs, a bit too absently to be comforting. He doesn't seem to realize that his new reporter is announcing arrival. Then the telephone rings and the city editor is immersed in long conversation. The cub waits, nervously. The casual greeting has upset him. He knew that he was at the celebrated bottom of the ladder, but he hadn't realized that the ladder set its feet in the cellar.

At discouragingly long last, the city editor drops the telephone in its cradle and looks up again at the cub. The executive grins the least bit—or is it a restrained laugh? Then he thrusts out a hand.

“Glad to see you, Bennett. Just got in—the 3:12? Haven't had time to find a place to live yet, I suppose. You might try the Central House—old, but they say it's comfortable. Tell the desk clerk—Jim Harper—I sent you. You can live there for five dollars a week, and the coffee shop isn't too bad for some of your meals.”

“Yes, sir. Thank you.” The cub tries to choke a gulp. Do city editors always decide so easily where their new staff members should live?

Fifteen minutes later, with his two suitcases thwacking his knees, he is headed downstreet toward the Central House. If his baggage weren't so heavy, he'd square off his shoulders and

manifest to the world his returned confidence. For all that he has been but three days a Bachelor of Arts (Journalism), he doesn't feel like a just-made graduate. He is now a full-time reporter on the Middleville *Tribune*, even though his duties do not start until 7:30 tomorrow morning. He's a newspaperman now, one of "the gang." He's starting at twenty dollars a week, indeed unmunificent, but it seems likely to do. Figure five for his room, eight for food, a dollar for cigarets, another for laundry, and he will have five left without mortgage. It could be much worse.

He wonders what they'll have him doing tomorrow, how much his job will align with the picture presented back in Journalism 2, the sophomore reporting class. He is surprised how much he suddenly recalls from that old J-2 course:

The newspaper is a marvel of organization. With a small reporting staff, located strategically, it watches an entire city.

The reporter is the focusing point of the entire enterprise. He is the agency through which the paper obtains the daily record of what the city does and what's done to it.

The public knows about what's going on only what the reporter lets it know.

Those were some of the things the professor had said. They made reporting seem alluring—and challenging. "I hope he wasn't painting the lily too much," young Bennett reflects as he turns in to the lobby of the Central House.

The professor wasn't. Bennett will find before the week is out that each of the professor's statements holds water.

First, the item of organization. Reporters are not strewn at random around the city, in the wistful hope that they will be on hand when something newsworthy happens. Even a small city would require a battalion of reporters if the paper were to risk such a system. It knows that information—news—congregates in certain places, and it therefore devotes much of its attention to watching those places.

#### THE HELPFUL GOVERNMENT

Among the most carefully watched information centers are the government offices, city, county, state, and national. An

appreciable part of any government's business is gathering, classifying, and filing information. In general, one division or another is interested in whatever a citizen does that brings or might bring him into contact with other citizens. Only when he is acting in utmost privacy is the government unconcerned.

Thus a government has no records about what a citizen eats for breakfast, or whether he makes a shirt go three days in winter. Such affairs are his and his alone. But let him buy a pistol, and government must have a record of the transaction, so that the weapon may be more easily traced if it should be used feloniously. If he contracts a contagious illness, his physician must inform the government, so that his house can be placarded and the public warned to keep out of germs' reach. When he erects a house, the government must be informed, so that it can see that the building meets the municipal codes and is not a firetrap menacing the entire neighborhood.

Government, accordingly, is the most zealous information-collecting agency in the community and the newspaper expedites its own work by borrowing heavily and constantly from the records compiled by the government.

All government offices in the city, whether municipal, county, state, or Federal, are tapped regularly by one or more reporters who are specialists in understanding and explaining the forms of information they exhume. It would never do to send a different reporter each day to the city hall; the officials, knowing that the information they give can be distorted and twisted by slipshod reporting, would divulge only what the law compels them to. They would not talk freely to an unknown reporter and thereby risk an inaccurate or misleading presentation of their affairs to the public. The reporter hoeing the same news field each day is on a "run" or a "beat," and in most offices the best of these regular assignments go to the most competent and reliable reporters.

Not all information clusters within the governmental filing cases. Many private or "civilian" places are crossroads on the informational highways. Someone tells a reporter that he hears that the national president of the A.F. of L. will be in town next week; the "tip" can be verified at Central Labor Union headquarters. Is the convention of the state dentistry society to be

held July 16 to 18 or 26 to 28? The Chamber of Commerce will know. Is it true that McKinley High School was built on ground once used for Indian burial mounds? The curator of the local historical society can answer promptly.

The more productive of these news sources are visited daily, the others as often as experience shows to be necessary. Whether it is dealing with the government or with some private repository of facts, the newspaper obtains a heavy tonnage of information from the records that these agencies maintain for their own purposes.

Second, the item that the reporter is the focusing point of the entire newspaper enterprise. Assuredly so, for information has no shoes and cannot walk into a newspaper office and announce itself. It must be hunted and sought out.

#### HOME-GROWN NEWS IS BEST

Ordinarily, the most interesting news is that about the newspaper's readers, its customers. That Harry Wilton, the plumber's assistant, has inherited \$1,500 is a strong item. Scores, perhaps hundreds, of the paper's readers know Harry or know of him. "Wish I could have some luck like that, Harry. I'd finish paying off the mortgage and buy a new car." Once that \$1,500 is linked to "one of us," it becomes more newsworthy than the \$100,000 crown jewel stolen from the Sultan of Singay, three continents distant.

News from the most glamorous of the world's far corners is of less value to a paper than is news of its own front yard. The staff members who handle this distant intelligence, the ones who arrange the pages to have attractive appearance, the erudite who write the editorials, are valuable and respected workers, but if all of them were to die overnight they would be less missed than the chaps who bring in the stories about the Johnsons' golden wedding anniversary and the fire that smoked up Mrs. McCabe's newly painted kitchen.

American cities are so different, one from another, that a "standard formula" for producing a successful newspaper is impossible to build, yet one doctrine is of almost universal applicability: Plenty of local news—that is, plenty of local reporting.

Third, the item that the public knows only what the reporter permits it to know. The day is too short for George Burton to do much more than care for his own job. He had hoped to attend the annual meeting of his church, but he had to work late at the office that evening. He heard the fire siren about midnight, but he was too weary to go out and chase the trucks in order to find out what was burning. He has heard rumors that the factory on East Street will take on fifty more employes, but he can't stalk the superintendent to find out if this cheery rumor is true. Instead, he expects his newspaper to tell him.

"They say that new minister at the Sixth Church is splendid. I'd like to go hear him sometime, but I never seem to get around to it." The newspaper on Monday gives a digest of that new preacher's sermon. Carelessly done, the account suggests that he is a sensation-seeker or a broker in strange and polysyllabic words. Accurately prepared, the account shows him as a careful and scholarly builder of ideas.

"Seems like the aldermen don't do anything but wrangle. They ought to get down to business." Perhaps the aldermen seem ineffective and foolish because they are reflected to the public by a reporter who doesn't understand what they are trying to accomplish.

"I hope they send that fellow up for twenty years. He's a plug-ugly if there ever was one." He may indeed be an unusually dangerous criminal, or he may be a minor offender described by a reckless reporter as much more menacing than actually he is.

The reporter is regarded as an "expert observer." Readers accept his version. "The paper said it was like that, and it's their business to know." The claims of an automobile or life-insurance salesman must be argued before they are believed; the claims of the reporter are of almost instant acceptance. The profession is of too much importance to the public to have practitioners of doubtful quality.

#### PUSH OUT YOUR CHEST

How Reporter Bennett measures up in his work for the *Tribune* will depend to a considerable extent upon the view he takes of that work. If he regards it as a "game," he will remain a rick-

ety and rough-edged workman. He will dig hard only when he believes that a story has a good chance to appear on page 1. Other stories he will dismiss casually. If he views his work as a "trade" he will be a faithful plodder in the mediocrity of routine, diligent but never looking ahead, and never making himself master of a news situation before it collides with him. Only when he sees his work as a "profession" will he do his work, and himself, complete justice.

A "professional man" is a student, a person who never stops learning and investigating. Dr. George Bristol goes to Harvard Medical School for four weeks in the summer when he might be "up north" fishing for muskellunge. The doctor is merely keeping up with his field, finding out more about subjects little known when he was in medical college ten years ago. Exactly so does a good reporter observe and study his city and its people. Alderman Brinkerhoff introduces an order for the city to modernize its fire-alarm system and within thirty seconds his proposal has been referred to a committee for study, and no more will be heard of it for weeks, perhaps months. But the next day the city hall reporter has a half-column story about the alarm system, recounting its history and cost, and outlining what a new arrangement would cost and offer the city. No one on the staff seems surprised that he was such an authority on fire alarms; "knowing about things" is part of his taken-for-granted work.

This does not mean that the reporter is up daily until midnight, wearing out his eyes in dismal research, or that he is so serious that he can't catch a joke on the first telling. It means merely that he is forever learning more about his community—and this learning requires deliberate effort. It doesn't "just come."

Young Bennett goes to the office that next morning fifteen minutes ahead of time. A lie detector hitched to his arm would reveal him a bit scared. He is a freshman again. He has seen a few too many motion-picture distortions of newspapering. He expects to be ordered curtly to "hustle over to the police station," where he will mingle with the city's most disreputable and dangerous characters. He expects that, as he leaves, the city editor will shout after him, "Get the story or don't come back."

Admittedly, the police station used to be a favorite proving



ground to find out what stuff a cub had in him. Some city editors still feed their newcomers on nothing but crime. It hardens them in a hurry or it discloses them as good-natured chaps whose stomachs are too weak. But the police beat has spoiled many a good reporter by making him cynical. It shows him life in the highly unpleasant raw. Helping haul mashed-up passengers out of a wrecked automobile or listening to a drunken sot tell how he pounded his wife's face into pulp before he strangled her dispels a cub's notions that sweetness and light abound, but it is poor fare for an immediate and steady diet. To the scarcely mature and glaringly inexperienced reporter it seems convincing evidence that the world moves entirely in bloody and low-motived fashion. Accepting such a bilious viewpoint, a reporter discounts everything. "He gave \$10,000 to the hospital. Why not? Look at all the income tax it helped him escape."

Probably Reporter Bennett speedily will become acquainted with the police station, but he will not do all his work there. The "regular" police reporter is somewhat older, has had a wider experience and so is more able to keep in a better perspective the murky view of life that the police run offers.

The warning to "get the story or don't come back" is heard today in few offices, mostly those of the nation's handful of bad-actor newspapers. That philosophy, proclaiming that "anything goes so long as it brings in the story" has too much Nietzsche and Machiavelli. It tolerates keyhole snooping, photograph stealing, masquerading as a policeman, and all the other banditries that make the movie reporter a fellow who would steal his host's silverware. Today's city editor expects his reporters to be enterprising and persistent, but to be gentlemen.

#### A NEW BREED OF REPORTER

In the era between 1920 and about 1930, when the tabloid papers, now much quieter and respectable, were at their peak of ruffianism, a few offices held that the end justified almost any means of obtaining it. In most staffs, however, the tabloid was unable to halt a process of infiltration. A hundred years ago, newspaper workers commonly were of grade-school education; forty years back, they were high-school graduates; within the

last thirty years, the newcomers have been increasingly of college experience. Only a few years ago the Inland Daily Press, representing about 300 Midwestern dailies, conducted a detailed personnel survey. It found that in its members' offices, those of the staff aged thirty-five or older generally had not gone beyond high school, but that the overwhelming pluralities of the younger workers were college or university trained.

The gradual rise in the educational standard has been accompanied by an equal elevation of newspaper ethics. Few university alumni will work for an executive who is a sneak and a cheat, and the executives have made the most of this by holding their staffs to constantly higher levels.

In doing so they have had the unspoken but extremely effective support of the public. American newspapers are not censored as are those of the dictator nations, but in a different fashion they are censored quite as heavily. In Germany, for example, the government determines what shall and what shall not be printed. In this country, the public decides. If a newspaper displeases, the public withholds its patronage.

A few years ago, an undertaker wrote a magazine article, "And Sudden Death," in which he showed how ghastly are the results of automobile accidents. At once, a murmur arose: "If the newspapers would do this same thing, day in and day out, they'd make people realize how frightful accidents are and safe driving would become general." The newspapers coöperated. They did not write that "his chest was crushed"; instead, they told how the broken ribs protruded and how bits of lung oozed out of the battered torso. That was more than the murmurers had expected; described in their true frightfulness, automobile accidents were so horrible that readers could not stand the details and were sickened and terrified.

"We asked you to do it, but we can't take it. Please stop."

The newspapers did stop, for all that they knew they had a weapon which, if anything could do it, was capable of scaring the public into carefulness. A newspaper that ignored the protest against the "And Sudden Death" form of writing would have lost so many friends and readers that it would have been in danger of insolvency.

Young Bennett needn't worry about being asked to do the impossible. The city editor will test him in various ways, to see what are his resources, but he will be given time to "find himself." In that finding, he will do what he is told, but on his own he will be making himself an authority in one or several varieties of news. Perhaps he is given the church beat, not too highly regarded because the last two fellows who had it failed to see its possibilities. Gradually, Bennett becomes the paper's religious expert. Then when he tells the city editor, "Chief, I've got a grand offer from the *Capital City Gazette*," the answer will be, "We'll meet it if we possibly can. How much will they give you?" Certainly "we'll meet it," for if we don't we lose a staff member who cannot be replaced speedily, simply because no newcomer will have the deep and particularized knowledge that the church specialist has built up through the months and the years.

At first, young Bennett will not worry about becoming an expert. He will be busy enough getting acquainted with the city. When he knows that Eastern Avenue is on the west side of town and that the Garfield School was named in honor of a missionary rather than a President, he will begin studying the paper to see what phases of news coverage have not been exploited and, open therefore to his entrepreneur ambitions, can lift him from an ordinary to a specialist reporter.

Every city has these opportunities. In many towns the "round-house run" was discontinued in First World War days when military duty shrank the staffs. After the war, the railroad news was overlooked. An alert reporter in a city where railroad men are numerous can rebuild this beat. As it becomes more valuable to the paper, so does he.

"Hello, Bennett. All ready to go?"

"Yes, sir."

The city editor nods. "Good enough. We'll see what you're made of." The editor is wrong; in some lines of work, the executive will see what his subordinate is made of, but in reporting the subordinate shows the editor. The reporter does things more than he has things done to him. He stands a better chance of "writing his own ticket" than in many other occupations. If he writes himself into mediocrity, it is likely to be his own fault.

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## 2

# THE REPORTER'S WORK

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### A MAN WITH TWO JOBS

THE REPORTER'S WORK divides into two central parts: getting the news, and writing the news. Skill in either field may permit him to hold a mediocre position, but if he is to advance into the more exacting and better paid places he must be both a good fact-gatherer and a qualified writer. If either aspect is more important than the other, probably it is that of ability in writing.

This comes from the change that the years have made, not in the reporter's orbit, but in the city editor's. Half a century ago, the city editor expected to be also a schoolmaster. The new-comer on his staff was at best a high-school graduate. He knew little of the mechanics and none of the niceties of writing; he was likely to be of mournfully skimpy background in history, economics, government, or politics. A gem he might be, but fresh from the mine, and the city editor was the lapidary who must polish him.

Today's city editor has neither time nor desire for pedagogy. He watches over a much more complex community than did his predecessor. When a windstorm in 1860 snapped tree branches and tumbled chimney tops, the city editor dispatched a reporter to find out how much delayed the "steam cars" had been, to ask if the police knew of any horses so frightened by the storm that they had bolted, and to inquire when "this new-fangled electric telegraph will be working again."

The news chief now must amass information from a dozen sources that didn't bother the old timer because they didn't exist.

What today's storm did not only to railroads but to bus systems, air lines, trucking, and private automobile traffic must be checked. Its effect upon the electrical systems demands finding out about telegraphs, telephones, radios, light circuits, and power lines. What happened to the sewers, the water mains, the golf courses, the flower beds in the parks, the baseball diamonds, and the stores' plate glass windows must be investigated. If the storm broke at certain hours, hotels must be queried to learn whether they were crowded with suburbanites who couldn't get home and are overnighing in the city. Perhaps hospital officials must be asked whether any operations were in process when the lights went off. Because communication is so integrated, the surrounding communities must be plumbed, so that their stories can be woven into the storm roundup.

Then, too, newspapers are larger now. In Civil War days, even the New York publications were so proud when they swelled into twelve pages that they proclaimed atop page 1 that this day they offered "triple sheets." Today a city of only 20,000 may look upon a twelve-page paper as skinny. Yesterday's editors issued one edition a day; now many offices no sooner have one edition printed than they tear it apart and rebuild it into a revised version, to roll through the press perhaps less than an hour later. Safe behind a mask of moustache and sideburn whiskers, the city editor of a few decades ago expected that much of the day's news must wait until tomorrow before it could be clunked into type. The editor of today glances at his wrist watch, and somewhat nonchalantly tells a reporter, "You've got twelve minutes, Harry; give me a quarter-column on that story."

This smokeball place has done things to the city editor. No longer can he be shepherd to green reporters. "I train my cubs," he says, but what he means is that in odd moments he gives them a few snatches of fatherly admonition. For a continued and systematic training he simply has no time.

"What was wrong with that story I wrote yesterday?" a cub asks.

"Look at all the changes the copy editors made. There's your answer."

It is an unsatisfactory answer. The new reporter compares

the printed version with the one he wrote, but he doesn't understand why all the changes were made. He inquires of a copy editor.

"Come around later," is the reply. "I'm too crowded now with first-edition stuff."

In lonesome isolation, the newcomer decides that certain things are done and certain others aren't. Two days later, trying to be faithful to the "rules" he has fashioned, he finds that what wasn't wanted on Monday is demanded on Wednesday. His head whirls.

Because of his slightly greater age and its supposedly concomitant maturity and because of his better acquaintance with various backgrounds, the college-trained cub seems a safer bet today than does the lad with less formal education. Though they may be equally green at the outset, the university reporter should develop more rapidly and should be less baffled by the alfresco instruction from the city editor.

Precisely as he views the college graduate as having more promise, the city editor also holds him from the start to a higher standard and expects more from him. "You've been to college and yet you write like a seventh-grader," the executive snorts. "I know you have to have time to get acquainted with the city, but I didn't think I'd have to show you how to handle the language."

Distinctly, the new reporter will not be promoted if his copy is no better than that turned in by the youngster who twice a week submits the "Lincoln High School Jottings." If he thought newspaper work alluring because "you don't have to bother with a bunch of rules about writing," the new reporter had better consider some other occupation.

### PRECISION

In getting news, the reporter faces a constant demand for exactness, both of fact and of statement. Writing a term paper for History 118, American Government Before 1861, the student doesn't know whether Vermont was an independent republic for twelve years or fourteen. (Actually, it was thirteen.) He hedges and writes, "during these approximately dozen years.

... .” When he becomes a reporter, such circumlocutions are forbidden. The city editor motions him to the desk.

“You say it was ‘unseasonably warm’ this morning. Call the weather observer again and find out whether it was 84 or 85 at 7 o’clock. The exact temperature is what we need.”

In his paper for Economics 1-B, the student put it this way: “The absurdity of an inflated currency did not deter various cock-eyed senators. . . .” When the reporter writes about the meeting of an old-age pension league which he disapproves, he comments, “Another far-fetched speech was that of. . . .” The city editor shakes his head sadly. “No, no, Jack; you tell what they did and said, and let the readers decide whether it was good or bad. What was that bit of Hamlet’s just before the curtains closed on him? Something like this:

But let it be: Horatio, I am dead,  
Thou liv’st, report me and my causes right

Shakespeare told you fellows what to do.”

“Listen, Mr. Anderson,” the cub protests, “isn’t there any room in this newspaper business for an occasional mistake?”

“There shouldn’t be, Jack. In almost every other line of work, you have a second chance. A lawyer loses a case, but he can appeal the decision and maybe do better when he fights it over again. If a doctor doesn’t know what’s wrong with a patient, perhaps he can give a shotgun medicine, a little of this and a little of that, good for everything from amnesia to sciatica, until he thinks it out more completely.

“We can’t do that. You write that the accident happened at the Milwaukee road crossing on Tenth Street. That’s the Burlington line’s crossing, and readers know it. I’ll get twenty phone calls the next day and letters about it will come in for a week.

“Of course we make mistakes, but we wince for every one of them. We have plenty of chances to get things twisted. Our paper today has more wordage than any novel since *Gone with the Wind*. I don’t know how long the *Gone with the Wind* people took, but I’ll bet the author worked on it much more than a year and the publishers used from four to six months for their end.

We had about eight hours for our job, but we don't use the time clock as an excuse if we get something wrong."

Sound doctrine, this. If a newspaper began excusing errors, it very soon would be making them with machine-gun rapidity. Over there, near the all-window wall, where the sun pours in as hot as Tophet on wash day, three men sit at a large desk and read, read, read. They are the copy desk crew. They inspect all the news, whether it comes from the masterful United or Associated Press or from the most greenhorn reporter. "Oh, Jack," a copy editor calls. "The Sherman Avenue bus route is No. 4, not No. 3 as you have it. And you say here that the avenue was repaved in 1937. It wasn't; it was paved in 1938. Check up on some of these things before you turn in your copy. Do you want to be a cub all your life?"

Upstairs, in the composing room where the type is set, three gloomy men examine every line to see that it is free from error. Even so obvious a mistake as a transposition of "the" into "hte" is corrected.

As soon as the edition appears, the city editor and the copy desk men scrutinize it quickly. Something was wrong with a headline; a copy desk man scuttles down the iron-runged ladder to the press room to stop the "run." The edition must be delayed until the blemish is removed.

If the new reporter had visioned newspapering as a work in which speed alone counts, he will be quickly educated out of this notion. Every office gives its newcomers a how-to-do-it manual explaining its preferences and prohibitions. This "style sheet" inevitably opens, ends, and is punctuated with exhortations for "Accuracy Always." The new reporter sniffs. "That means as much as the average traffic law." Half an hour later the city editor is at his elbow. "Jack, your story yesterday said this tramp who was run over by the freight train was Thomas B., and today you call him Thomas D. Can't both be right. Find out once and for all, and find out right."

"Heavenly days," the cub murmurs to himself. "They do mean it."

Indeed they do.



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### 3

## AROUND THE OFFICE

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### ONLY A FACTORY

A NEWSPAPER PLANT is a factory, as much a factory as the place where automobiles, refrigerators, or radios are made. Realizing that he is a factory worker always is a jolt to the new reporter, but it is a most necessary one.

Reporter Bennett, quartered now at the Central House and waiting for tomorrow when his work begins, wanders downstairs to the lobby where the night clerk recognizes him as a homesick youngster and obliges by making the desired small talk.

"What's your line, Mr. Bennett?"

"Newspaper." Rather loftily, "I'm joining the *Tribune's* reporting corps."

Not staff, mind you, but corps.

"Oh." Then the clerk brightens. "I know some of the *Tribune* fellows. My team bowled against them last week. The linotypers, they were. I know your city editor, too—Jerry Anderson. He's a good guy to work for, I guess, and he keeps 'em right on their toes all the time."

Bennett mumbles "Good evening" and hurries along. There can be no pleasure in conversing with a man so ignorant that he mentions linotypers in the same breath with a city editor. Improper, virtually immoral. And what business, pray, has a hotel clerk referring by nickname to so exalted an executive as a city editor?

Nonetheless, the hotel clerk had the right view; the "mechanical men" and the "brains department" are to be mentioned in the same breath. The newspaper factory has five central characteristics:

1. Each department is kept in motion by highly skilled employes. There is little place for unskilled help, and in this respect the newspaper differs from various other factories which require a few superlative and many routine workers. When Bennett looks at a linotype or intertype, massive typesetting machines so delicately arranged that a featherweight touch on a key is enough to put the whole processes into action, he realizes that the "back shop crew" is made up of experts. Bennett hammers a typewriter and is glad that he does not have to worry about getting the right-hand margins even; the compositor does have to worry about them, for all that ingenious space-band devices help him. He must get every right-hand margin absolutely even, and do it rapidly enough to set a column or more of type an hour.

2. Each department is the direct outgrowth of inventions. The machinery of the newspaper is elaborate, expensive, and premeditated. It didn't develop by chance. The inventions that made it possible are breath-taking. A man in London inserts a photograph into a machine with various dials and gauges, and that picture is sent by radio to New York, where it "decodes." Sending sound through the air is unbelievable; transmitting sight truly is miraculous.

3. Each department is as independent as the weather, yet the newspaper cannot be issued unless each department coöperates constantly and thoroughly with the other divisions in the factory. At 9 in the morning the editors send news to the composing room in 500-word stories; at 1 in the afternoon the editors may slice news into 100-word or 50-word fragments, not because they wish to be "dramatic" but because at that time of day the short section fits better into the composing room's necessities.

4. The newspaper plant works at a tremendous speed. Some years ago the Philadelphia *Bulletin* printed in book form the contents, excluding advertisements, of one edition of one day's paper. The book required slightly more than 300 pages. That enormous mass of reading matter was written, edited, set into type, the type fitted into pages, the pages stereotyped and then printed, in not more than eight hours, more probably about six hours. It is no trick at all for a newspaper to produce 100,000 words of reading matter, again not counting advertisements, in a third of a day.

5. The newspaper plant does its job with a correctness and an accuracy that only those within the profession can appreciate. The railroad company has an elaborate signal and train-regulating system to keep the eastbound flier from smashing into the west-bound local, and it spends money lavishly to maintain this system. The newspaper matches the railroad; everything that young Bennett writes will be inspected, that is, edited, before it is put into type and then the type will be inspected and corrected before it goes into the page. Surely, the inspections sometimes fall short and errors get into the paper, but each page, capable of presenting about 8,000 words of news, offers more chances for mistake than there are individual letters on that page—and there can be about 56,000 letters.

Only when Bennett realizes these five considerations will he be psychologically ready to fit into the newspaper factory. Until he does appreciate them he thinks of his department as the most important unit. Each department is the most important; there would be no paper today if any one of them went fishing.

#### ORGANIZATION

Newspaper organization is standardized in its main outlines and consists of five principal departments: business, advertising, editorial, mechanical production, and distribution or circulation. Look at each of them.

The business department, often known as the "front office," lives on the ground floor. It has an array of desks, telephones, typewriters, filing cabinets, and similar furnishings. "Bunch of bookkeepers," Bennett snorts the first time he looks in upon the front office. The work of the business office may not be inspired or glamorous, but it is inescapably important. Running a newspaper calls for heavy expenditures and only a little waste is needed to take all the profit out of an edition. The business office keeps the accounts, collects money owed the paper, pays its bills, and is quick to tell the publisher whether the trend is toward profit or loss.

The correspondent in suburban Westville turned in a telephone bill this month of \$52.15, and the business office investigates supplying him with a fixed-charge wire from his house to the

office. Such a circuit may be available for only \$47.50 a month. The front office people study the Westville telephone bills for months back before they advise retaining or changing the system. The difference between \$52.15 and \$47.50 does not alarm Bennett until he gets a look one day at the weekly payroll for the suburban correspondents and sees that it totals \$434. "Great glory," he ejaculates. Yes, newspaper costs always are high. Bennett realizes now that the front office crew is justified in exulting when it finds a way to trim a recurrent bill from \$90 to \$88.

The advertising department is a universe by itself. "Ah, they just take orders for ads." That is only a part of the ad staff's work. Orders do not drift in; they must be sold, as vigorously as the house-to-house canvasser peddles his vacuum cleaners. Making a sale may call for an elaborate investigation of the local and regional markets, to provide statistics with which to prove to a manufacturer or distributor that this newspaper, rather than any other advertising medium, can make money for him. Such a survey may involve calls upon hundreds of housewives to get the information that shows the prospective advertiser that he is failing to tap this market deeply enough. This "merchandising service" or "promotion" is only one of the ad men's worries. Another is that of writing advertisements, and they must be good ones otherwise the advertiser will not give the paper any more of his ads. The want ads seem trivial to Bennett who wonders why the ad people always are so gloomy when the "classified" drops a trifle in quantity. He does not realize that a full page of want ads means hundreds of dollars to the newspaper.

Young Bennett is quite wrong if he regards the business and the advertising departments as "necessary evils." They are essential and in every sense of the word desirable. Were it not for these two departments, Bennett probably would have no job; if he did have one, it would be so servile that it could not command his respect. The following would be a more nearly accurate perspective:

These two "dollar departments" produce all, or virtually all, of the paper's revenue. The circulation branch of the business department accounts for about thirty per cent of the newspaper's income and the advertising department for about seventy per

cent. Some papers, usually small, have job- or commercial-printing departments which bring in about five per cent of the total revenue. These are the only "incoming" channels in the newspaper system; all other divisions, including Bennett's, are "outgoing" or "spending" channels. A single tour of the building will show Bennett how dismayingly many costs go into the production of a newspaper. Let him wander down to the subbasement and see all the rolls of newsprint, rolls weighing 1,100 to 1,200 pounds each. Casually he counts them; he is well above forty when he realizes that he has covered only a fraction of the number.

Suddenly he remembers—and, for the first time, appreciates—what one of the journalism school professors said about the cost of white paper: "When the *Gazette* increases an edition from 40 to 42 pages, the white paper alone means a \$300 increase in that day's expenses." The *Gazette* has a circulation of about 225,000; Bennett's paper prints only 25,000. "That's a tenth of the *Gazette's* circulation," Bennett reflects. "Adding two pages in this plant means enough to pay my salary for a week and a half."

Indeed, the extra two pages bring further costs. They mean nearly a full day's work for two more typesetters, they mean more manpower to put that type into pages, more effort for the stereotypers in preparing the plates that go on the press, more work for the pressmen in attaching those plates, more ink to print the pages, more weight for the delivery trucks to carry, more postage to be paid on the copies sent by mail. Bennett begins to understand why the Saturday edition, slim in advertising, is held to twelve pages even though many good stories must be compressed severely to allow the type to crowd into the restricted space.

In the composing room, a make-up man clips a "rule," a metal strip used to separate two columns, and misjudges the length. A trifle peevishly he sets aside the spoiled rule; he does not throw it away. Later in the day he will be able to salvage all or most of it. Short as the final trimmings may be, the fragments of rule are collected carefully, to be melted, remade, and used again.

Such economy is not miserliness. A newspaper's mechanical

forces use so many materials, and in such quantities, that reduction of waste results in impressive money savings. Bennett can see that printer's ink, stereotype mats, wrapping paper for the circulation department, and gasoline for the delivery trucks cost money. He may not appreciate that money must be set aside to pay his social security tax, to make the engraving that illustrates a story he writes, to pay for the gas and electricity the plant consumes, to pay for the paste a desk editor uses in rearranging a story, to buy a city directory so that Bennett can verify names and addresses, to buy the daily health column and the children's story for the feature page, to pay for press association membership, and to pay the janitor who sweeps up the crumpled first-drafts of stories Bennett wisely rewrote before he submitted them to the city editor.

"Glory," Bennett murmurs, "this is an expensive factory to run." And intricate, as well. Bennett's typewriter needs a new ribbon, and "the system" must see that a ribbon is available. A composing-room saw blade drops a tooth, and "the system" must have a new blade on hand. The 48-point, hand-set type for the major headlines is losing its sharpness, and again "the system" must provide new metal before the old type becomes too blurred. A newspaper works too rapidly for wants to be satisfied only when they have appeared; they must be anticipated. Operating a foreseeing system calls for extensive personnel, always costly.

Yet the editorial department is not a tolerated nuisance. Despite the fact that it spends rather than makes money, it is respected ungrudgingly. The advertising and the circulation departments would have nothing to sell were it not for the fact that the editorial department turns out a product that is welcomed in a profitable number of homes. The most efficient composing room, able to handle tons of type at gratifyingly low cost, and the most alert advertising staff, able to prepare alluring designs, will be utterly useless if the editorial force cannot hold the respect, confidence, and good will of thousands of readers.

The American newspaper is founded upon mechanical competency, commercial sagacity, and editorial integrity. There can be no editorial integrity without financial independence. None of these activities is "dominant"; the three go together as partners.

It is not so everywhere. The income-producing departments in various foreign journalistic worlds do not provide enough revenue to make the newspapers financially independent, and the editorial departments must trim their sails to suit the political or commercial groups that make up the papers' deficits by means of subsidy, often a secret and hidden subsidy. Tomorrow Bennett will write about a former mayor arrested for drunken driving; he writes confidently and without fear. However influential that former mayor, he is not powerful enough to cripple the newspaper for telling that he got into trouble. In another country, such as France, where advertising and circulation revenues are scanty, the former mayor's enmity easily could be so damaging that the paper would omit mention of his arrest rather than risk his ill will. Elsewhere abroad a good part of the press is acknowledgedly for sale to the highest bidder. Bennett would enjoy a position very little on such a staff.

The American press used to be somewhat like that, but the business departments did their work so thoroughly that they gave the editorial staff the strength to be fearless. In return, they ask that the editorial men and women turn out a product that is honest and intelligent. That American newspapers are the best, and by far the best, in the world is as true as daylight. The quality comes from the teamwork of the various departments. No one department, no two departments, can do the work alone; each component in the newspaper must help to carry the load. When Bennett genuinely appreciates this, he will view the "dollar departments" in their proper light, as being allies of his own department, neither superior to it nor inferior.

The editorial department ramifies widely. Bennett is interested first in his own division, the city reporting staff. What it writes goes to the editing or copy desk to be inspected, corrected, and equipped with headlines. The editors or "desk men" cluster around a large desk, often in horseshoe shape, with the chief sitting so that he faces his subordinates. Because of the horseshoe shape, the chief is surrounded on three sides by desks and is said to be "in the slot" and his helpers "on the rim."

The slot man is the news editor, in charge of deciding what copy goes into the paper, on which page, at what length, and with what

headline display. On larger papers, his deputy, the make-up editor, is stationed in the typesetting or composing room to superintend the placing of type in the pages; on smaller papers, the news editor goes to the composing room a short while before an edition is to "go down" and himself supervises the page make-up.

The copy desk on a sizable paper has at least two subchiefs, the telegraph editor and the suburban or state editor. The telegraph editor is in charge of processing the news furnished by the press associations, Associated Press, United Press, and International News Service. The state editor directs the work of the "county correspondents," reporters—often working on a part-time basis—in the various nearby communities where the paper circulates. The out-of-town readers are more numerous if the paper offers them news of their own villages as well as worldwide affairs; hence each town in the "trade area" has a correspondent.

The newspaper obtains its information about the world beyond its trade area through membership in one or more press associations. The association has its own staff of reporters and correspondents all over the world. They send their news to central "bureaus" where it is routed to the newspapers that would be most interested in it. Thus a Vermont story might be sent to New England papers only, and a New Hampshire chronicle might go clear across the country. The Vermont news was too limited in interest to have a wide distribution; the other story seemed to be inviting to readers everywhere. The press association is big-business; Associated, before the Second World War began, spent \$10,000,000 a year to collect news from all parts of the world, and United's budget ran above \$9,000,000. In each case, about 1,400 newspaper "clients" paid the bill, determined on the basis of the quantity of service they bought and the size of their circulation. The bill runs from less than fifty dollars a week for a tiny paper to several thousand dollars for a metropolitan publication. The "wire" news comes into the individual paper's office on electric printer machines, somewhat resembling overgrown typewriters encased in metal hoods. These machines pound away at sixty words a minute and even a "short" wire pours 25,000 or more words daily into the newspaper office.



The structure of an editing desk is individual with each paper. On some, the city editor has his own copy desk for local news; on others, the desk is "universal" and the editors handle whatever sort of copy may be available at the moment; on still others, the desk is "semiuniversal," with separate staffs for the most productive news categories and all other information going through the "miscellaneous" or "universal" members of the desk.

The sports department generally is an entity, with its own editor, reporters, and copy readers. Wherever some classification of news is particularly valuable, it will have its own department. A seaboard newspaper might have a "marine editor" and another paper a "real-estate editor." Many larger publications have small but separate staffs to handle financial news.

The reference library or "morgue" is an important part of the editorial staff's equipment. It contains files of photographs and of engravings or "cuts," biographies of interesting persons, encyclopedias and other references, and bound volumes of earlier issues of the paper. Here the reporter goes for background or historical material.

The city editor, news editor, and sports editor are departmental subchiefs. Over all of them is the managing editor, who forms and directs the newspaper's policies and keeps the several staffs on the alert.

Off to one side is "editorial alley," where the editorial writers have their offices. The chief editorial writer usually is known as the editor in chief, but he may not be the active head of the paper. The active head may be the managing editor, the publisher, who represents the owner, or the owner himself. Adjuncts to editorial alley are the several critics or reviewers, as books and music, if the city is large enough to have such specialists.

The mechanical production departments are four: composing room, stereotype room, engraving room, and pressroom. The composing room sets the type, corrects it, and puts it into the pages. Employes working the typesetting machines are "compos" or "operators." When a story is in type, a "proof is pulled" by running the type through a small press, usually operated by hand, which makes a single impression from the type. This proof goes to the proof room where it is examined with the

copy from which it was set to see that the operator made no errors. If mistakes are found, they are replaced by new type. The linotypes and intertypes set an entire line of type as a single metal strip or "slug."

The type is collected on tables or "banks" until it is time to make up pages. Then a "floor man," supervised by the make-up editor, puts the type into the page "forms," large metal rectangles, which are "locked up" to keep the type from spilling and are sent to the stereotype room.

There the page of type is covered by a matrix or "mat" resembling papier-mâché and is passed under a roller whose tremendous pressure imprints the type characters upon the mat. The mat then is baked briefly, a process in which it is changed from flat to semicircular. Next the mat is put in an "autoplate" where molten metal is poured against it. The "plate" thus formed has the characters of the original type. The autoplate cools the plate and trims its edges. Now it is ready to go to the press. When each page is represented by a plate, the edition is ready to "run."

The engraving room makes the cuts which are the newspaper's illustrations. A picture is rephotographed through a "screen" with criss-crosses of thin lines which break the picture into tiny dots. This picture is superimposed upon metal, generally zinc, which is eaten away by acid in such fashion as to reproduce the dots of the screened photograph.

The circulation department takes the papers as they come from the press. Each twenty-fifth or fiftieth copy emerges at a slight angle, so that the circulation man can see how many copies he is picking up. The circulation department has charge of the newsboys who deliver the edition to subscribers and operates trucks which carry copies to newsstands. Out-of-town patrons are served by copies sent by truck, by train, or sometimes by mail.

When Bennett wanders through the plant and sees it all, he appreciates the quantity of intricate and costly machinery a newspaper needs. The linotypes probably average \$4,000 each and even a small paper may have more than a dozen. A \$30,000 press is relatively small. "Yes, quite a place," Bennett yawns, "quite a place." Some day he may see a 300 word story come in to the

office at 1:40 and be in the edition leaving the press at 2 o'clock. "Great guns," he marvels, "how far can we go in beating the clock?" Actually that story traveled at no terrific speed; it merely went from one department to another without waste of time. The entire secret is that each department worked with the other departments. "Oh, teamwork." A platitudinous way of saying it, but wholly true.

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CLEAN COPY

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## THE MARK OF THE EXPERT

THE CITY EDITOR crooks an imperious finger. The cub hurries forward. The editor thrusts at him a story the youngster wrote only ten minutes before. "Did you ever hear," the editor asks with menacing pauses between words, "did you ever hear of clean copy? Do you know what clean copy is? Can you write clean copy?" His voice accelerates. "Oh, you can? Then for heaven's sake, do it. Write this story over and make it look like something more lucid than a street map of Boston."

The story is tolerably well told, but the paper is scrawled with penciled-in corrections, and the typing is black with words "xxxx-ed out" in favor of afterthought phrasings. Mussy and messy, the story is hard to read and contains so many insertions between the lines that no room is left for the copy editor to make his corrections.

"Well, I . . .," the cub stammers.

"You thought that dirty copy was a sign of the professional," the city editor breaks in. "It isn't. It's a sign of the hick. Now clean up that story and do it in a hurry."

When the city editor makes his occasional check-over to see which reporters are climbing and which are going down hill, he looks closely at the cleanness or messiness of their copy. Copy is an indication of its writer's mental attitude. Clean copy suggests thoroughness and care, and hence trustworthiness as to facts; dirty copy bespeaks sloven and dingy work, and hence carelessness as to facts.

Clean copy has another market value: it goes easier through the editing desk. A bescrawled story is hard to edit. It is easier for the desk editor to kill all but the first two paragraphs than to revise laboriously all seven or eight paragraphs. The copy desk usually is busy enough that it can justify decimation of a sloppy story. The reporter whose copy is "always butchered by the desk" does well to ask whether his stories are clean enough that they can be edited rapidly and readily.

The city editor has his own opinion of the new reporter, but he wishes to see what someone else thinks about the recruit. The executive wanders toward the copy desk. "Not a bad story young Jackson wrote yesterday about the Kiwanians," he remarks idly. The desk chief knows what is meant. "Not too bad," he agrees. "Yes, Jackson looks like a comer. Clean copy, too."

Sometimes the news editor says instead, "That story might have been a lot better. Say, Andy, have you ever told Jackson the facts of life about clean copy? His stuff is dirty enough to make your eyes water." Jackson may have been flattering himself that he was drawing such good assignments that surely he had arrived; he will be depressed and perhaps mystified when now he is given nothing better than two-paragraph stories and the city editor throws half of them back for redoing, with a curt, "Clean copy, even if it does hurt." The probationary period is shorter when the reporter earns the name of a clean writer.

Clean copy doesn't mean uncorrected copy. Cross out carefully the errant words, and mark in neatly above them the correct versions. If such amendments are many, recopy the story. It takes only a few moments.

Much dirty copy is due to poor typewriting. Whether he uses the touch or the hunt-and-peck system, a reporter should perfect his typing as rapidly as possible. The way to do is to emphasize accuracy and let speed take care of itself. It will. The habit of good typing forms quickly, and so does the habit of erratic typing. Whichever is established will endure. Once you learn where the keys are, they stay learned.

When he makes a longhand correction, the reporter carefully distinguishes between letters confusingly alike. The *a* and *o*, *m* and *w*, and *n* and *u* readily are mistaken for each other. To pre-

vent this, the reporter overscores *o*, *m*, and *n*, and underscores *a*, *w*, and *u*. When he changes his mind as to paragraph sequence, he cuts apart the story and pastes it together again in the desired order, instead of trying to shift paragraphs by means of mussy direction-indicating lines or arrows. In brief, he is spinsterish about clean copy.

He is particular about another item: labeling his copy. Each office has its preferred procedure, but all the systems are basically alike. Each story is tagged, or "slugged," to show where in the paper it should go, who wrote it, and any particular information the editors may need. This "guide-line" matter is put in the upper left corner of the page, better than any other location simply because generations of editors have learned to look for it there and hence probably will miss it, no matter what its prominence, if it is elsewhere. "Where in the paper it should go" means merely a statement as to what page would be appropriate for it, page 1, city page, or suburban page. Unless the city editor suggests otherwise, the reporter assumes that his story will run on a city page. The "particular information" may be a statement that the story is exclusive and not shared with the rival paper, or that, though it deals with material previously printed, it contains much new matter, or that it has especial interest for certain editions. The first edition, for example, goes to communities west or south of the city, the second to towns north or east, and the third edition to readers within the city. The cub has a story about a man from West Hebron but forgets to tag it "1st Ed." Instead he marks it only "City," and the news editor puts it into the pile of copy to be edited reasonably late in the day. The first edition is roaring off the press before the story is given out for editing.

"Hey," the copy editor shouts, "this is a first-edition story."

The news editor looks at it. Indeed so. "Freshman," he bel-lows, "how about marking them '1st Edition' when they're about people out in that territory? The people up at West Hebron would have liked this yarn of yours if they'd had a chance to see it."

"I didn't know . . ." the cub stammers.

"You'd better know. Find out where the editions go and mark your copy right."

Everyone in the office grins; having a cub around the place takes some of the tension out of life.

The sluglines properly located in the upper left corner, the reporter drops four or five inches down the page before beginning his story, thus leaving the copy editor ample space for writing in the headline or adding any further directions that may be needed.

Before he has been on the staff long the cub learns to tell early in the day whether the paper is so tight that news of the governor being killed by a hit-and-run driver would be sliced to six paragraphs or is so open that the burning of an empty barn can be told at quarter-column length. Usually the paper is tight, and the cub realizes that a story interesting to all editions has better prospects than one appealing only in one edition. He is writing about the meeting of the Sixth Church Women's Foreign Missions Society. Happily, his notes tell him that Mrs. William Heber of West Gloucester and Miss Sally Woodbury of East Bradbury were guests. Chortling, he marks the story "All Eds." The news editor starts to put it in the right-away pile, but pauses long enough to skim the story. "Oh-ho," he snorts, "that ancient game again." He marks out the "All Eds." and scans the copy a bit more. Then he takes it back to the city desk. "Dozens of names in this story, Andy," he remarks. "Might be a good idea to have that kid verify them all."

One look at the copy tells the whole episode to the city editor. Needling a story with an "All Eds." label when its around-the-clock justification is as thin as it is in this case makes the reporter no friends. Between them, the news and the city editors will run him ragged correcting, patching, rewriting that story. When all the hazing is done, the city editor will deliver a brief but ferocious lecture on ethics.

When a story carries a picture, the reporter marks it "With Cut" and tells what the picture is about and how many columns wide it will be. Without this warning, the story goes to the composing room and the type set from it is promptly plowed into a page. Later, much later, the engraver brings over the cuts and

the make-up editor seems to have one too many. He tramps into the city room.

"Who knows about this three-column cut?" he asks loudly, as he displays the engraving.

"Oh, that goes with my Old Home Day story," the cub bumbles.

The make-up editor looks at the news editor. "Wasn't marked 'With Cut,'" the news editor declares.

"I guess I did forget to mark it," the cub confesses.

"Which means I have to pull apart a page that's ready to go," the make-up editor growls. "How the merry something-or-other am I going to get this edition away on time if I have to be rebuilding pages because some something-or-other freshman doesn't let me in on the secret that he had a picture with his story? How the . . ."

Muttering, he plods back to the composing room. The cub looks around, mournfully. Apparently he still has to learn several things about this newspapering at which he had believed himself already so expert.

A final item as regards marking copy: each story carries an end-mark to show that it is complete. Both editing desk and composing room are snarled by copy unmarked as to its completeness. The natural assumption is that more is to come, and an editor sets aside the seemingly unfinished story to await arrival of its last fragment. Then he becomes so busy that he forgets the lost sheep. When finally he rediscovers it, there is much shouting of "Where's the rest of this Lions Club story?" Helpfully the cub says, "Oh, that's all there is." The copy editor's comment may be brief, but it cannot be misunderstood.

Proper marking of copy is a sign of a reporter who knows his way around the office. When a newcomer takes himself too seriously, the old timers say nothing. They wait patiently; before long a story inadequately slugged will appear, and when it does they have the big-headed youngster in excellent position for some verbal manhandling.

### THE STYLE SHEET

In two more respects the new reporter should polish his name quickly: mastering the style sheet and "learning the town."



The style sheet is a pamphlet with minute—and occasionally contradictory—instructions as to the paper's preferences in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, abbreviation, and other grammatical or stylistic points which might be in dispute. Shall it be a "cigaret" or a "cigarette" tax? Is the European city "Praha" or "Prague"? Shall "monsignor" be abbreviated to "mgr.," which might be mistaken for "manager," or to "mons."? The style sheet settles all these disputes by setting up once-and-for-all decisions. These decisions are not of the "right" way, but of "our" way. The language is too fluid for these much-argued points to be determined on a basis of "right" or "wrong." The best that can be done is to decide which of two or more ways the paper prefers.

This uniformity has definite value. It helps readers, and it helps reporters. Readers become unconsciously accustomed to the paper's style and thereby can read more easily.

Com. Walters then was detailed to Charlestown,  
where he met Lieut.-Comdr. Abbott and Commander West.

With the title "commander" tossed about in such random fashion, a reader could not feel familiar with the paper's methods. Particularly in regard to words of more than one meaning is the style sheet a benefit:

The democratic government lasted only a  
few years and was replaced by a republican  
organization.

The Democratic government lasted only a  
few years and was replaced by a Republican  
organization.

The first instance is baffling, since it seems to refer to two parallel systems of government, whose distinctions only the political scientists understand at a glance. The second instance is at once clear, for capitalizing Democratic and Republican shows that the words refer to political parties rather than to systems of government.

When he first looks at it, the reporter doubts, loudly, that the style sheet will help him. He sees a maze of rules, perhaps 150

of them, and realizes that he must return to eighth-grade memorizing before he can learn them all.

Suppose there were no style sheet and the reporter must refer in a story to Norwalk, Connecticut. "Which is our way?" he asks.

"Conn.," a colleague replies.

Two days later the reporter bumps into New Haven, Connecticut. "What did you say our abbreviation is?"

"Ct.," someone shouts back. From another corner, "It is not; we don't abbreviate it at all." For six or seven minutes the wrangle goes on. Finally the city editor returns from his cup of coffee. "New Haven," he declares, "is so well known that we don't have to name the state it's in." Valuable minutes have been wasted, and the next time the reporter needs to know what to do with Connecticut the debate will be repeated.

The style sheet avoids this useless argument. It tells just what to do with Connecticut, and if the reporter forgets he has quick access to the authoritative answer.

Buckling on to the style sheet is not as difficult as the reporter had feared. He finds the rules grouped by subjects; all injunctions as to punctuation are in one section, all references to abbreviations in another. He begins by noticing which directions he already practices; these rules need not bother him, since they already are his own. He gives his attention to the directions which are new and strange. As he considers each rule, he notices also the examples which illustrate it. If he forgets the rule, he may recall the example and thus avoid the necessity of looking up the rule. Also he notices the exceptions.

Were a style sheet as well integrated as it should be, its rules would have few or no exceptions. Sadly, the sheet usually is the work not of one person but of several individuals, and hence is full of compromises, that is, exceptions. Says the sheet, "Do not abbreviate names of states or months having fewer than five letters. Exception: Iowa." Why the managing editor of twenty-four years ago wished to abbreviate Iowa but not Utah no one remembers now, but he was highly insistent and had his way, in return for agreeing with the editor in chief that Pittsburgh should be spelled without an "h." Iowa's exceptionalness has

continued, largely through the mortmain of tradition. Every style sheet has inconsistencies, even inanities. The reporter could draw up a much more sensible one. The style sheet directs, "Spell it 'hight,' not 'height,'" and then cites the postal guide as final authority on place names, thereby demanding "Hasbrouck Heights" rather than the more consistent "Hasbrouck Hights." So be it; like any other umpire, the style sheet is bound to miss some things.

A valuable help in mastering the style sheet is to begin by determining its major characteristics or trends, likely to be most readily seen in regard to capitalization and abbreviation. Style sheets divide into three groups. First is "up style," using many capitals and, generally, few abbreviations. Such a sheet calls for "City Hall" and "Twentieth Avenue." The opposite practice is "down style," with few capitals and many abbreviations, as in "city hall" and "20th ave." The in-between or moderate down style makes it "City hall" and "20th avenue."

The value of a quick mastering of the style sheet comes from the impression it makes upon the copy desk. When the city editor wanders over to obtain reactions to his new reporter, the copy editors will tell him, brutally and gleefully. If, after only three days on the staff, the newcomer has learned the style sheet, the copy desk men will be so impressed that they boost the recruit. The city editor doesn't let the copy desk evaluate a reporter for him, but he knows that the desk editors have an unexcelled chance to see how high or low the writer's work assays. They must read every word. Their approval is worth having.

Mastery of the style sheet hits the copy editors hard, because the staff generally has one ignoramus or swelled-head who can't or won't learn the rules and whose stories, ergo, must be read with painful thoroughness to make them conform. Because many recruits have been slow in learning the style sheet, the desk editors expect that every newcomer has molasses in his brain. When they find he hasn't, they are happily and vocally surprised.

#### WHERE IS NORTH STREET?

"Learning the town" is valuable in two ways. It saves the reporter's time, and it delights the city editor. The editor expects

that he must tell the newcomer where the Johnson & Morse factory is, though it is the largest plant in the city. When he says, "Go find out what the hotel has to say about this," he must add, "See Henry Short, the assistant manager; Clayford, the manager, won't tell you anything." When he dispatches the newcomer to the Hawthorne School, he must tell him which bus to take. He knows that for weeks he must accompany every order with an explanation. Each explanation reminds him that the reporter is a cub; a seasoned staff member wouldn't need to be told how to get there and whom to see. The sooner, therefore, the newcomer can get around without this guiding, the sooner he registers in the chief's mind as "old timer."

Too many young reporters don't study the city; they become acquainted with it slowly. "Sixth ward, is that on the North or the East side?" If the city editor forgets the explanation, they ask for it. Occasionally a bright lad appears who gets hold of the city directory and the telephone book classified section and spends the evenings of his first ten days on the job in learning about the city. He studies the streets, the transit systems, the location of fire and police stations and substations. He learns about the city government and memorizes the names of aldermen and department heads. He investigates the city's commerce and industry. He learns of the churches and their ministers.

The city editor holds out a clipping. "Jack, ask the Unitarian minister what he has to say about this. He's the Rev.       "

"The Rev. Oliver T. Green, 120 Euclid Avenue," the reporter breaks in, smiling like the mouse that found the cheese jar with the cover removed.

"How'd you know who he is?" the city editor demands. "Are you specializing in ministers?"

"No, sir. But I thought I'd better find out who's who in the city, so I wouldn't have to work so hard when you send me chasing people."

"Okay, kid."

Certainly it is okay. This cub has demonstrated his resourcefulness and his enterprise. He has marked himself as of more than average ambition. The other newcomer in the office wonders why he gets the P.T.A. meetings while Jack goes to livelier

happenings. The city editor isn't playing favorites; he is simply giving the more engaging, and therefore more demanding, stories to the reporter who has shown the greater evidence of readiness to tackle them.

Learning the town demands compiling long lists of names and addresses. The principal lawyers, the doctors, and other professional persons must be on the list. Each hotel is there, with a notation as to the kind of customer it draws. The police are informed that Mrs. J. Westby Brown has died and that her husband, a traveling salesman, is supposed to be somewhere in their territory. "They haven't started hunting for him yet," the police reporter comments. "Too busy with this Harrington murder. They'll get around to it by evening."

"Too late for us," the city editor frowns. "Jack, give the hotels a whirl."

Jack, knowing the city, realizes that only two of the dozen or more hotels attract traveling men. Without asking which hotels to call, he slips into a phone booth. Five minutes later he tells the city editor, "No J. Westby Brown at the Belmont or the Clarendon. Want me to try any others?"

"No; not worth while. He'd be at the Belmont or the Clarendon if he's in town."

Yet if he were sent to find United States Senator Horace Greenlake, supposedly stopping briefly in the city for a breather in his vacation motor trip, Jack might have the Belmont and the Clarendon at the bottom rather than the top of his list. He would know that the Arlington or the St. Regis catches the senators and other such dignitaries. Looking for a barber or a mechanic, he would try the Morrison (Rooms seventy-five cents a day, special rates by the week) or the Hotel Cleary (Office on second floor, walk up and save a dollar a day).

Studying the town undeniably is work, but it is profitable. Not only will it impress the city editor, but it will reveal news sources the reporter can tap when he is on the prowl for unassigned stories. "Big paper Friday," the city editor announces on Wednesday. "If you have any specials up your sleeves, shake them out for Friday."

One reporter stares at the floor. How should he know of

specials? If the boss will tell him where to go. . . . Jack has discovered, in the telephone classified directory, the name of a man who lists himself as a diver. What is a diver doing 800 miles inland? He should be on the seacoast. Jack visits the diver and gets a nice interview story.

"Good enough," the city editor responds. "Didn't know we had one of those fellows in town. How'd you bump into him?"

"Didn't know we had one of those fellows in town" is one of the highest praises a city editor can give. It's worth working for.

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## 5

### MEET THE CITY EDITOR

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"MORNING, BOSS"

THE STAFF MEMBERS are coming in to begin the day's work. The city editor already is at his desk; except for the "morning-glory editor," he was the first to go on duty. An inverted world, this newspapering, where the boss is on the job before the hired men. One after another the reporters appear, and each voices a different greeting to the city editor.

"Hi, Jerry."

"Morning, Gerald."

"Hello, Mr. Anderson."

"'Lo, Andy."

"Good morning, sir."

A stranger would deduce that City Editor Gerald Anderson plays favorites terribly, that he accepts some subordinates as equals and holds others rigidly in the ranks of inferiority. The stranger would be entirely wrong. The reporters themselves, and not the city editor, determine with what tone and familiarity they address him. Another evidence that newspapering is upside down?

More likely it is an evidence of an extremely healthy situation: "the boss" himself rose through the ranks, survived the hammering given every cub. In all but a very few offices the city editor is a onetime reporter; he is not someone who became an executive by a short cut that exempted him from pulling an oar along with the other galley slaves. He, too, once was a galley slave, and he knows what it is to take orders.

In some other occupations an executive can reach the pinnacle

because of politics, pull, or marrying the owner's homelier daughter and, with a little luck, can hold his position. His subordinates may know that he is a stuffed shirt, but they will not too often expose him.

Newspapering, *laus Deo*, isn't like that. If "the boss" hasn't been scorched by the same flames into which he orders his assistants to plunge every day, that fact very soon becomes known. For all his suavity and dignity, or for all his brusqueness and bark, the word circulates that "He's never done what we're doing; he hasn't been up against the things we're running into." Newspaper folk are independent enough, irreverent enough, to enjoy letting "the boss" know what they think of him. If he is executive in fact as well as name, he must be genuine.

All this counts, and heavily, for Roger, the cub. Rog will be judged by a man fit and worthy to judge him. The city editor may seem quick on the rebuke, short-tempered at hearing explanations, and unappreciative of diligent work, but he once took the orders he now is giving.

That helps Roger adjust to office methods, but one friction remains. The city editor says little, if anything, about salary raises and advancement to a more responsible position. "This is a blind alley," Rog laments when, three months with the paper, he finds his pay envelope unaugmented. "You can work like the devil, and that fellow never notices it. No chance for advancement here; if I'm going to do any rising, I've got to find a paper where the city ed. doesn't let things just drift along."

An understandable lament, and mainly to Roger's credit. But he doesn't know the background of his job.

The city editor is fundamentally conservative about some things, and staff promotions are one of them, for he knows that few reporters ripen overnight. The tomato on the vine isn't green at 7 o'clock and luscious red by noon. That tomato can be plucked and heated in the right way so that within a few hours it will be red—on the outside. At its center, it will be green as a cucumber. Most reporters are tomatoes. The city editor prefers to have them "come along" slowly, and ripen all the way through, rather than quickly and only a quarter-inch deep.



A complication has hit the city editor within the last decade. Twenty years ago, the inexperienced man or woman could land a job on a big-city paper. Often, cubs were taken on in batches, with the expectation that one out of a dozen would be worth keeping. The others were sloughed off the payroll in a month, two months, three months at the longest. This brutal system didn't work. The city editor, increasingly busy as the news world became more complex, gave preliminary training to eleven youngsters who were gone within a few weeks. The one recruit who remained had received only a little training, simply because at the start he looked no better than the eleven who failed, and the editor had to divide his schoolmastering among the dozen instead of concentrating it on the one who was to be retained.

### THE VILLAGE SCHOOL

Metropolitan and submetropolitan city editors found a way out. They stopped hiring green hands, and insisted that a recruit serve an apprenticeship on a small-city paper. If he made good there, the bigger paper could take him on with some confidence that he would finish his seasoning rapidly.

This new system did things to the smaller offices. Newcomers there looked upon the first job as a stepping stone, as an interim of exile to be endured only until they could convince metropolitan city editors that they were now of sufficient aging to be worth hiring. The "rural" city editor broke in the cubs, and as soon as they were able to swim without his supporting hand, off they went to a larger paper and he had to begin all over again.

Some smaller-city executives went defeatist. "What's the use of monkeying with a kid, when he walks off as soon as he's any good?" A city editor with that attitude has no "policies" about developing and advancing young reporters. Happily, he is in the minority. Perhaps the others trust too much that there is a Santa Claus, but they continue to hope that a reporter they have trained will stay long enough to justify the work invested in him.

Walter J. Pfister, city editor of the *Sheboygan, Wisconsin Press*, tells the executive's point of view in a letter to the director of a school of journalism. Mr. Pfister has just hired a member of

the school's graduating class to replace a man, graduated the year before and now gone to a metropolitan paper. Mr. Pfister comments:

"What are we going to do about keeping our men instead of providing a training course for the large-city newspaper? I have two definite suggestions—one on your side of the fence and one on mine.

"Yours would be an emphasis on good ethics, an appeal to unselfishness. I believe a lecture or two on this subject in one of your courses would help. Your students are going out in the world. Any city editor who will give them jobs in these days of overcrowded professions will look mighty good to them. Will he look as good a year later when the former cub is beginning to win his spurs and has established that necessary confidence in himself?

#### THEY GROW UP SLOWLY

"You and I know that it takes a year to season even a most apt college graduate, and to be really worth his salt a reporter ought to be with the same paper at least two or three years. There are reasons for this. For instance, it takes at least a year to run the usual gamut of experience, so that a reporter knows just what policy and what judgment must be used in a certain type of emergency. A reporter does not become worth a good salary until he is so versed in what is expected of him that he can take initiative in the absence of the city editor and do exactly what should be done. In brief, a newspaper man ceases to be a cub only when he no longer has to ask questions—when he knows his job so well that he acts first, when speed is essential, and reports back to the office later. No man who has worked on a paper less than a year and a half is capable of doing that, and I know whereof I speak because in the fifteen years I've been on this desk I've broken in quite a few men.

"That is only one reason why an inexperienced man cannot expect big money at the end of his first year. There are others. It takes a man more than a year to get acquainted with all the important people who are not on news runs but who must be handled deftly when they do enter the picture. A reporter who can call men like that by their first names is certainly a more

valuable man than is the first-year cub who probably has never even seen this particular news source.

### CITIES AREN'T ALL ALIKE

"Then, too, every community has its own traditions, its own customs, its own viewpoint. A story that might pass unnoticed in one city might stir up the wrath of an entire community elsewhere. For instance, Sheboygan is predominantly German. While I can find little sympathy in Sheboygan for Hitler or the Nazis, it would be just too bad if some story made fun of or cast reflection on German literature, songs, folk customs, and other things that real Americans of German descent still love despite their loyalty to the United States in every other respect. A man cannot learn all those things in a year.

"Another point—and this is very important: a man of a year's experience cannot know the paper's complete background and the names of all its friends and enemies. A new man might be abrupt with a real friend of the paper and grant a big favor to an arch enemy because he didn't know the background. I do not mean that the average paper runs around gunning for its enemies. What I do mean is that every paper has a score or many scores of people who are its real friends. When anything happens, their first thought is of the newspaper and they telephone the tip to the office immediately. It is only logical that a newspaper will be as friendly as possible to such a man. On the other hand, why should a paper go out of its way to please a man who has knocked it all his life and likes to see the opposition get all the scoops? It takes years for a man to learn all those things and as a result his only safe action is to refer to the city editor all instances in which he doesn't know the background. That is why a city editor's job is harder with new men on his staff, why he justly feels that he will not pay a good salary until a man has spent two or three years learning all these things.

### THE PAPER'S POLICY

"A reporter can't learn all about his paper's policy until hundreds of questions have come up in his personal experience and he

solved. That may sound far-fetched, but don't forget that the regular subscribers have been reading the paper's editorials and news stories for years and they know what the paper stands for almost as well as do the old employes. They are the first to note a news story or a feature article that looks like a departure from policy and they delight in calling the publisher and asking him if he has done a flip-flop.

"In addition to knowing policies, it is important to know personalities. There are definite things the average publisher likes, and there are definite things he doesn't like. He wants all the news in the paper, whether he likes it or not, but he's more enthusiastic about the kind of stories he does like. He has his friends and his enemies, if he is any kind of a live wire in his editorial columns. A reporter is not of great value until he has been around long enough to know what to go after and what to stay away from.

"Touching further on personalities—a reporter has to reach John Jones immediately for a brief interview on a final-edition story. It's after 4 P.M. and Jones has left his office without telling where he was going. The cub or first-year man is stumped. The broken-in man knows which golf course, tavern, or club to call.

"Now, in view of this partial list of circumstances, is it fair for a graduate to leave his first employer just when he is getting confidence that he can cover properly most of the assignments given him? I say 'No' unless, for some good reason, he is unhappy in his environment.

#### STAY PUT FOR THREE YEARS

"My advice to any graduate is to plan to remain with his first paper for at least three years. He will find that while most small-city papers start new men at modest salaries, they usually in the long run treat an able man very fairly.

"Because of the difference in the cost of living and the prosperity or lack of it in newspapers of various communities, it is obvious that a specific discussion of salaries is impossible. In nine cases out of ten I believe it is safe to say that the salary scale among the smaller-city newspapers is comparable to that of the metropolitan newspapers when a comparison of the cost of living

in the larger and smaller cities is taken into consideration. It is reasonable therefore to observe that a reporter who leaves the smaller-city paper for a metropolitan one for the sole reason that he is immediately getting the raise that he will earn on the smaller-city newspaper during the period of a year is not much better off financially than he was before.

"When he is in his third year, a man on the small-city paper will know whether or not he is developing into a crack reporter. If he is the plodder, just-get-by type, he'd better keep quiet and let things take their course. But if he finds he is getting the important assignments, apparently is being relied upon, then near the close of his third year he should have a talk with his city editor. In most instances he will find that if he tells the city editor he likes the town, enjoys the job, and would like to be permanent if he could get more money, the city editor will be more than willing to pay the money the reporter now deserves.

"On the other hand, if the paper is having financial difficulties and simply cannot pay much more at the time, the city editor will do one of two things.

"He will ask the reporter to try and hang on in hopes that conditions soon will warrant the raise he deserves, or he will tell the reporter frankly to look for greener fields. I have yet to hear of an instance where a city editor or a publisher stood in the way of the promotion or progress of a good man, but when I say 'good' I mean just that. They will either meet or better any offers the reporter got elsewhere, or they will tell him to take the better offer, not only because of the money element but because of the greater opportunities for further advancement later.

"So much for what I believe every college graduate should be told, possibly just before graduation, when it will sink in.

"Now what can the city editor do about it? When he finds a man who looks good he should try to advance that man a little more rapidly than normally is customary, though that has its problems. In times of depression, for instance, the business office frowns on too rapid increases in payroll. Then, too, after being advanced rapidly, a man may think that he is better than his own original estimate of himself, and may leave his first employer despite the good treatment given him. The city editor's best bet

is to try to get a man who likes the town, who looks like a substantial rather than a restless fellow. When a city editor finds a man of the former type, the rest takes care of itself in time.

"Perhaps I am being selfish in a way, but let me point out that the journalism school's chances of getting jobs for its graduates will increase if it can sell the idea of some permanence in those jobs. I know some offices are prejudiced against university men. Why? Because they believe that the university men expect the big money right away and will jump at the first offer of a small increase in salary.

### A COMMON PROBLEM

"I sincerely believe that journalism schools and city editors have a common problem in promoting permanency of employment. College men are young and ambitious, educating them has cost a pile of money, and if they are capable they deserve the better things in life. But they must be just as fair to their first employer as to any other. As years go on, a city editor is less and less pleased at the prospect of breaking in new men, but the job appears far less disagreeable if he knows that a college man not only breaks in more quickly than a man without special training but will pay some of his 'tuition fee' by remaining at least three years, so that his teacher will have him for at least one year during which he is not always asking questions or turning in copy that is dynamite."

There are the views of an experienced city editor, given with complete frankness. They were not written for publication, but Mr. Pfister consented to their reproduction in this book.

Surely, young Rog is to be fostered in his desire to get ahead, but he can see now why three months haven't made him the best reporter in the paper's whole history.

Perhaps Mr. Pfister should have hammered harder at the comparative living costs of his city and of metropolitan cities. "More money" doesn't mean inevitably "more buying power." Moving to a higher salary can mean going to so expensive a city that the bigger salary is a pay cut rather than a boost. Assuredly the notions that work in the big town is inherently livelier and that advancement to a higher rung on the ladder is certain are the

heights of wobbly thinking. Many a small office has positions as demanding, as challenging, and as rewarding as those in the metropolis. Rog would appreciate this if he could count the number of newspaper folk who can say truthfully, "I was offered a grand job in New York"—or Chicago, or Los Angeles—"but I like things here too well to change unless they fire me."

#### GOING UP THE LADDER

How shall young Rog conduct himself to be one of the recruits Mr. Pfister would promote a little faster than usual? First, of course, he will pick up as fast as possible the background about which Mr. Pfister was so demanding. That means he studies the city constantly, learns its history and its characteristics, its ways of doing business. It means also that he meets as many persons as he can, meets them and comes to know them so well that they are eager to give him information. These persons will be in every stratum: lawyers, Chinese laundrymen, clubwomen, truck drivers, preachers, policemen, and school teachers. "Contacts," Rog will call them, but a better name might be "news gold mines."

He will follow orders, enthusiastically and intelligently. He has no excuse for coming back from an assignment with nothing to write, for each assignment offers three possibilities:

1. The story that the city editor suggested. Said the editor, "Cover the Rotary club meeting and listen to Senator Griswold. He's talking on 'The Trouble with Taxes.' It should be good." Very likely it will be.

2. The story the city editor forecast and one he didn't suggest. Senator Griswold is suddenly cautious and says, in effect, only that "We have taxes every year." Even so, it's a story. But Rog bumps into a Rotarian just back from the other side of the country and has both the speech story and an interview with the traveler.

3. A substitute story when the one envisioned by the city editor blows up. A special meeting of a legislative committee kept Senator Griswold at the State House. "No 'Trouble with Taxes' story," Rog reflects. "It's not my fault." But there is a "Trouble with Taxes" story, one telling why the speech wasn't given. Certainly Rog won't let himself down into the position of

the journalism co-ed sent to report a church forum, which had been canceled without adequate notice. About thirty persons came to the church and found it shut. For half an hour they waited, meanwhile conducting an informal forum of their own, virtually complete except that nobody passed a collection plate. The girl didn't see that the informal forum on the church steps would make a good little story.

### NO TRESPASSING ON MY JOB

Rog knows that the ace reporters are specialists, who know more than anyone else in the city about a particular news field. Sadly, the specialist positions seem most adequately filled, by young and distressingly healthy reporters. The chances are remote that a specialist will be removed by collision with a coal truck. Rog hatches the incandescent idea of developing his own specialty.

Quick analysis shows him that several forms of news are covered irregularly, if at all. He never sees a story about stamp collectors, amateur photographers, or dog enthusiasts. Rog prowls and finds that the lensfolk are well enough organized to have a club and that the stores report increasing gains in film sales. Since Rog knows which end of a camera to point at the victim, he decides that he will become the paper's photo specialist. Aflame with enthusiasm, he braces the city editor.

"How about a daily column for the camera enthusiasts?" Rog asks.

"Oh, I don't think so."

"Well, at least a once-a-week column. Why, there are hundreds of camera enthusiasts, and every one of them would read the column. Think of the promotion you could give it—page 1 display about 'Every Friday, latest news of the world of photography.' It'd make a big hit."

"Possibly."

Rog can't understand the city editor's balkiness. The city editor has his very good reason; he doesn't wish to herald a "splendid new feature" and have it peter out in three weeks because Rog can't find enough to write about. That doesn't mean that he is hostile to Rog's proposal.



Columnists are among the city editor's pet hates. Dozens of cub reporters have tried to sell him the idea of taking them off work that wears out shoe leather and letting them sit in the office all day, "interpreting" the world or coaxing glistening humor from the typewriter. Why running a chatter column should seem so attractive, the editor doesn't know, but he does know that altogether too many reporters view it as delightful and fact-gathering as boring. Rog didn't ask to be a commentator, but that word "column" prejudiced the editor nonetheless.

If Rog is wise and determined, he begins searching for camera news. He attends a Camera Club meeting and writes a story of it. He learns that Inez May, teacher at West High School, experimented with ocean pictures while vacationing on Cape Cod last summer, so he interviews her to find out how she made water and clouds behave. Eastman Kodak or Agfa Ansco introduces a faster film, and Rog has some of the enthusiasts tell him their success with it. The more he digs into the photographic universe, the more stories he gets. The city editor says nothing, though he uses the stories.

Confident finally that he will not run out of material, Rog submits for the thick Friday paper a column of the sort he proposed months ago. By this time the city editor knows that Rog is fairly well established with the camera enthusiasts; even so he clips from the column the announcement that "This weekly feature will be presented each Friday." The next week, Rog turns in another column, and again the city editor deletes the "weekly feature" blurb.

If Rog surrenders with an "Oh, what's the use?" shrug, the city editor continues to say nothing. Rog should be more persistent, and offer a column for the next Friday. This goes on for weeks. The city editor meantime does a little quiet sleuthing. He asks his own contacts, more numerous than Rog would believe possible for a man who spends all day inside an office, "What do you think of our Friday camera column?" He gets a warming number of responses that "It's good stuff, and people read it." Eventually he asks Rog, "What sort of a standing head do you think we should have for this Friday camera stuff?"

From then on, Rog is "the camera expert."

## FORTY HOURS A WEEK, PLUS

One danger crops up in Rog's process of making himself a specialist, that of neglecting his regular assignments in order to develop his camera column. The city editor assigned him to the Utopia Today pension plan meeting, which came at the same hour as the Camera Club gathering. Rog covered Utopia Today by a telephone call to the secretary, and thereby was able to attend the camera session. If he does much of that, the city editor will know that assigned work is being short-weighted.

"In other words, I have to build up my specialty on my own time, and not on the paper's?" That's the size of it. Wagner and state labor relations laws haven't changed, and cannot change, the fact that the routine worker never does anything after the five o'clock whistle blows and that the ambitious man usually has to do more than the boss asks before he wins recognition as being better than average. If Rog waits for circumstances, that is, luck, to give him the chance to "show what he can do," he is in no way branding himself as lazy or shiftless, but luck sometimes takes a long while in coming. Rog therefore may wish to hasten things by manufacturing his own luck. Since the "regular job" keeps him busy, he must do the manufacturing during hours when he is off duty. Roger's chances for hurry-up promotion demand forgetting about the forty-hour workweek.

## A. F. OF L., C. I. O., OR A. P. S.?

This brings Rog to the question: what about labor unions? Both the A.F. of L. and the C.I.O. have editorial workers' unions, the C.I.O. American Newspaper Guild being the better known. In some cities Rog must join the union if he is to get a job. Then let him join without hesitation. Elsewhere membership is optional, and some offices have no unions, although the law forbids any attempt to prevent their formation. Rog wonders, "Wouldn't working conditions be better if someone started a union in this office?" They might, and they mightn't.

Which union to join, A.F. of L. or C.I.O., no one can say, because editorial unions are too young, and have been too embroiled in the A.F. of L.-C.I.O. civil war, for anyone to forecast which if

either organization will survive. The organization that finally represents the editorial staffs may not yet have been established. Rog does well to think of the possible wisdom in "letting nature take its course" until it is more evident with which union a new unit should affiliate.

If he yearns for a membership card, let him think about the American Press Society, at present a "professional" organization more akin to the lawyers' and the doctors' groups than to the trades unions. Rog won't be eligible yet for more than junior membership, because A.P.S. demands that a full-fledged member have four years of experience. In other words, it has picked up a device the trades unions have used so successfully, that of differentiating strongly between the "apprentice" and the "master workman." A.P.S. is more concerned with standards of work than with economic organization, yet, because of that distinction between the beginner and the seasoned worker, it quite well may become as powerful a factor in economic advancement as will the A.F. of L. or the C.I.O. union.

That one sort or another of editorial workers' organization will become firmly and permanently established is generally agreed, but which organization and what its complexion remain most definitely uncertain. Let Rog be patient; the Pressmen's and the Stereotypers' unions developed slowly, but with a success that many other unions envy. The editorial side has too much to risk to hurry unduly.

### SCOOPS

If Rog has seen enough movies, he comes to his reporting with the notion that the road to fame is paved with exclusive stories, scoops. The movie reporter forever is revealing information that sinister plotters try to keep hidden; he exposes the mayor's grafting or the frame-up against the governor. A year after joining the staff he is famous.

It isn't that way in real newspapering. For one thing, many cities have but one paper and hence there is no opposition to scoop. For another, the exclusive stories, at least those of stature, generally are "broken" by reporters of long experience rather than by newcomers. Surely, for only the man with the experience is

likely to have the contacts necessary to locate, and then blast open, the deep-buried information. Now and then a cub lands a smashing scoop, but only now and then.

Scooping the world can be highly dangerous for Rog. The city editor sent him out to Sixteen Acres to cover a civic league meeting, but he hears a trifle of gossip that suggests a reverberating revelation. Off he goes, chasing the gossip and forgetting about the civic club. Hours later he finds that the gossip was baseless, that he can't pry loose enough specific information for a story, or—most probably—that even though the gossip was true the situation it hinted explains itself so lucidly that there isn't any story. Meantime, he missed the civic club meeting. The city editor calls him for it.

"This other story would have been so much better," Rog protests.

"Yes, but it fizzled."

"It might have developed . . ."

"Next time I send you on an assignment, you stay with it. If you run into any great revelation while you're on the way, keep on going for the civic club. You can tell me about the revelation when you get back. If it's worth following, I'll put someone on it who can track down the story. If you bobble another assignment in order to go on a wild goose chase. . . ."

"Yes, sir," very meekly.

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## 6

### NEWS VALUES

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#### THE FUTURE BOOK

FOUR O'CLOCK. The final edition has rolled and almost everyone has gone from the city room. The typewriters are silent black hulks, their stories for this day told long ago and no one has decided what they will tell tomorrow. The city editor lingers, writing entries in the future book, suggestions for stories to be followed tomorrow, or many days hence.

"The book" is an enormous ledger, a page given to each day of the year. Here the city editor records his news calendar, to the most minute item. The Kennel Club's monthly meeting comes on the 16th; on the page for that day he enters a notation, "First plans for annual dog show." How does he know that this particular meeting will include the preliminary announcements for the show? He has a clipping from this afternoon's paper, an "advance" story about the meeting on the sixteenth. The tri-county optometrists' society will meet on the twenty-fourth at the Hotel Warren. On the page for the twenty-fourth, the editor records this information. State Senator Harry Durbin will address the Optimist Club on the thirtieth, and on the page for the thirtieth the city editor writes in a reminder of Durbin's coming.

Each day he explores the paper for entries for the future book. He examines out-of-town papers, for they have many hints. The paper from Capital City runs a story about a motorist finding a flaw in the parking ordinances and thereby escaping a three-dollar fine. The city editor clips this item and pastes it on tomorrow's page in the future book. He will send a reporter to ask the city attorney whether the same dodge could be worked in this city. His mail includes a score of club, church, and society calendars

from which he winnows entries. The wall calendar with the holidays and anniversary days listed in red reminds him of the "annual" stories for Columbus Day, Armistice Day, Flag Day, ground-hog day. His reporters have turned in "tips" of happenings not yet happened. The telephone has brought him suggestions from well-disposed readers who said apologetically, "I thought you'd want to know." Finally he has his own ingenuity to devise still other stories.

The totality nearly fills the page, and from this page, plus what comes automatically from his reporters on runs or beats, he has the "predictable" news outlined definitely and thoroughly. It takes him only a moment to see that tomorrow will be a heavy day; his reporters must work with alacrity. Too heavy a day. He crosses out entries for a couple of "can hold" stories, quite as good a week from now as tomorrow, and reenters them for other days that may be less busy.

The predictable news is no great test of a reporting staff's ability. Only when it swells to enormous proportions—half a dozen days a year—does it show the staff's quality or lack thereof. Even the "unpredictable" isn't always revealing, for the mammoth story may break on a day when other news is slim and manpower is plentiful. The day that genuinely X-rays the staff is the one when an unexpected story, or several unexpecteds, must be cared for in stride and the predictable news is too good to be ignored in favor of the sudden information. The ingenuity, elasticity, and durability of both city editor and reporter are made known on such a day. No such formal analysis is flickering now through the city editor's mind as he closes the book and grunts, "Tough day tomorrow."

The cub, waiting for the executive to be done with work, interjects a hesitant, "Mr. Anderson?"

"Yes, George?"

"What was wrong with that story of mine today about the old Garnett house that's being torn down?"

The city editor smiles. "I told you it was worth half a column, and then we printed only three paragraphs. When I gave you that assignment at 8 o'clock this morning, it did look like a half-column story, but a submarine sank with fifty-two men aboard,

the special committee released a 3,000 word report on the condition of the fire-alarm system that we hadn't expected until Friday, the Governor made another blast at the Legislature, and the Rotary Club meeting jumped from the usual five inches to a column and a half. All those things knocked the life out of your story. I'm sorry, but things like that happen. Day after tomorrow, that same story of yours might be good for a full column."

The city editor has preached two sermons, and a wise cub will remember them both.

The first preachment was that a reporter never regards what is done to his story as a personal affront. Cut in two, every sentence rewritten, or in its entirety left out of the paper, the story is merely a piece of copy that ran into misfortune; it is not a *casus belli*, to send the reporter on the warpath against copy editors and city editor.

Snorting with rage, a cub pounds over to the copy desk. "Who edited my story about the Rev. Mr. Kildare yesterday?" he demands loudly.

"Who wants to know?" asks the news editor with a warning sweetness.

"I do," the cub retorts. "Whoever edited that story cut the life out of it. He butchered it, made it into a piece of tripe."

"I'm sorry, sonny boy," the news editor replies mildly, "but tripe is about all you can make out of pig belly."

And for weeks afterward the cub suffers from the reputation of being a growler. His stories are read a bit harder than they were before, because every copy editor is eager to take part in showing the cub that he still has very, very much to learn. That he will grumble and complain when a story has been cut or abundantly edited is expected, but he grumbles and complains impersonally. Eventually the cub reaches the stage where he takes a story to the copy desk with a single, impersonal comment: "It's worth 500 words in anybody's paper, but I suppose this is the day the King of Kokomo got murdered and I'll be lucky to rate two paragraphs."

"Too much," the news editor grins. "Maybe we'll let you have one paragraph. Rest of the space goes for the story about the heat wave in Iceland."

Admittedly there are copy editors who are butchers, who insist on finding something wrong with every story, regardless of how precise its writing. These noseey fellows, fortunately, tend to standardize. They are most of all afraid that a reporter will take too long to say his say, and they amputate the final two or three paragraphs, however worthy. The reporter outwits such a buzzard by adding to a story two or three "slash paragraphs." The butcher kills these paragraphs and smirks fatuously. The reporter conceals a grin; he has given the butcher his moment of power, and yet the story has gone into the paper as the reporter wished it. However, let the cub distinguish between the careful, thorough editor and the butcher; there are far more of the former than the latter.

#### THE ELASTIC FORMULA

The city editor's second sermon had for its text that news values change faster than the weather. What a story is worth at 9 o'clock is not the least indication what it will be worth at 10. "Write it tight," the city editor warns at 9. An hour later he advises, "Let it run at length. We've gone up two pages."

Is there, then, no fixed and formal way to determine the news value of an event? There is nothing so absolute that it can be put into the immutability of a table of logarithms or of a chemical formula. What a story is worth depends upon the competition from other news, and this competition can change in intensity within a few minutes.

The telegraph editor shows the city editor a just-received bulletin: an explosion has shattered a schoolhouse with 600 pupils in it. The city editor nods. There will be armfuls of copy about this disaster; it will steal the front page and two or three pages inside. "Boil everything and boil hard," the city editor orders.

For a categorical definition of news, nothing better has been devised than that of the late Willard G. Bleyer: "News is anything timely that interests a number of readers, and the best news is that which has the greatest interest for the greatest number." Lacking in precision? Confessedly, yet every attempt to pin news down to a tighter definition has failed. The usual method is to build a list of all varieties of news. Either the list is so



short that it is meaningless or so long that it is cumbersome, and in either event it ends with this classification: "Miscellaneous." Thereby it admits that a considerable quantity of news resists squeezing into categories which can be numbered off as of 1-2-3 rank in importance.

Dr. Bleyer's definition remains the standard. Examine it to see its extensiveness.

"Anything." Of all publications, the newspaper alone finds use for this word. Every other publication is restricted to particular varieties of information. *The National Geographic Magazine* tells of travel and exploration, and has no space for an account of a baseball game that lasted twenty-one innings. *Better Homes and Gardens* has ample room for directions about re-decorating a living room, but the fall of a European cabinet is outside its sphere. Only in the newspaper is "anything" printable.

"Timely." The newspaper offers its readers new news, thereby differentiating itself from various review, analytical, and critical publications. The journal of an historical society is eager to discuss Daniel Shays' rebellion, for all that it happened nearly two centuries ago, but the newspaper will not mention it unless it sprouts some contemporary quality. If, perchance, an historian finds new information, to show that the rebellion was fomented by some European power hoping thereby to conquer the newly established United States, the recentness of this discovery will merit newspaper space, but Daniel Shays gets no mention unless in one way or another his enterprise again becomes timely.

Here, shamefacedly, newsdom must confess that it has gone too far. Some city editors, zealous to be up to the moment, have virtually ruled out a "yesterday" story and even proclaim the weird doctrine that an event happening at 1 P.M. is worth more, because it is more recent, than one taking place at noon. This warping is fading now, though it is not all vanished. Several factors account for the beneficial change:

First, there are more one-newspaper cities today, and hence news competition has changed.

Second, two episodes in 1930 made city editors wonder whether they had thought out their news policies carefully enough. The

first was the publication of the First World War memoirs of Gen. John J. Pershing, the American commander. Offered on a syndicate basis, the memoirs were widely bought and dissenting editors who had said sarcastically, "The war ended years ago," found that the public turned eagerly to newspapers carrying the general's revelations. Then the last camp of a Swedish explorer, Andre, lost in the Antarctic in 1897, was discovered. Some editors played this story high, with many pictures. Others passed it up. Again the public seemed interested, and again editors wondered whether "timely" should not be interpreted with more flexibility.

Third, the vastly extended foreign coverage of recent years has brought news from quarters hitherto unmentioned because of their previous inaccessibility. Floods and famines in the remote Chinese interior used to become known weeks after they had happened, and commanded scant space on page 26. Ever since 1931 editors wondered when the second Russo-Japanese war would start. For several years they have had dispatches from sequestered spots in Asia about battles between the Russians and the Japanese. The war quite evidently has been going on for years, on an intermittent basis, a battle now and a battle then, rather than the old-fashioned, seven-days-a-week war. Accounts of many of these battles have followed the fighting by days or weeks and hence were not "timely." Their disclosure, however, was new and "timely," and editors had been geared for years to regard this second war as big news. With the Associated and United Press giving generous wordage to these long-ago battles, editors realized that "it just happened" is no complete guide to news worth. "Timely" is being interpreted now much more sensibly than it was a few years ago, though there is yet some tendency to overemphasize it.

Going back to Dr. Bleyer's definition, consider "interests." Here is another word distinctive to the newspaper. A piece of news need not instruct, amuse, inform, or exhort; it is good if it be interesting. If it is important as well, so much the better. Critics of the newspaper condemn this viewpoint that "interest" by itself can make copy printable and argue that the press should give space only to the sober and significant news, to the things that history books to be written twenty-five years from now will find

worth mentioning. The newspaper's answer is always, "Is life actually like that, does it consist exclusively of ponderous happenings? Are people's daily lives matters only of crisis, or do they include much that is trivial and inconsequential? Since they include much that is trivial, how can a newspaper be a mirror of life if it overlooks the inconsequential?"

Here and there specializing newspapers have news definitions that emphasize social significance. *The Christian Science Monitor* perhaps is the best example. It presents only the "constructive" and "permanent" news. This is what its clientele wants, but this clientele is limited in size. The *Monitor's* definition, profitable for it, would bankrupt "general" or "for-all-the-people" papers.

"Number." Again the phrasing is peculiar to the newspaper. Other publications generally aim at restricted groups of readers. *The Woman's Home Companion* does not expect to be read by prizefighters, nor does *National Grocer* expect to be read by timber cruisers. Newspapers, unless they volitionally limit themselves, as a few have done, attempt to find readers from all groups, bishops and butlers, professors and plumbers, surgeons and sandwichmen.

What news is, accordingly, requires a very general definition, and the reporter must learn it by practice. The definition changes constantly. A few years ago anything linked to the mystic initials N. R. A. had front-page value; today the initials are almost forgotten, but C. I. O., unheard of in N. R. A. days, stands for "page 1."

The individual city and its surroundings exercise a powerful influence upon news values. Here is a city which is a junction for three main-line railroads; hundreds of its families draw their money from the railroads. Almost any story about trains is good for page 1. There is a city in which for ten months of the year baseball replaces the weather as conversational fuel. What the ball teams are doing goes into the paper at full length.

The commonest distinction, mentioned earlier but worth frequent repetition, is that between metropolis and small city. In the "big town," the unusual is news; in "the village," the familiar or the routine is news. Chicagoans don't know each other; hence

what they do is without interest unless it is somewhat violently out of the ordinary channel of life. A Chicagoan who breaks two ribs in a fall down the stairs won't get his name in the paper; too few other Chicagoans know him or of him, and his accident was not one which seems inherently and automatically interesting. The small-city resident who falls down the stairs is worth modest mention in the paper, because his name is known to so many of the paper's readers.

This distinction between Chicago and Junctionville is not one manufactured by the newspapers; it derives from the different state of mind found in the two communities. Metropolitan residents live in isolation; the neighborliness of the smaller community has been unable to survive an apartment-house atmosphere.

A speech made before a Chicago club must rely upon the prominence of the orator or upon startling statements if the speaker is not well known; so many speeches are made in Chicago each day that a newspaper there cannot give space to all of them. Hence, it selects the few that are "strong enough," which often means "unusual enough," to be commanding. The Junctionville city editor, however, has far fewer speeches to crowd into the paper; he is better able to afford the space a routine speech will demand. He is always conscious that, however undistinguished the speech, its maker is to many readers a person and a personality rather than a mere name.

The Chicago city editor can give space to slight news about big names, but not to slight news about unknown names. Before the owners of those unknown names are worthy of mention, they must do something so different, so striking, so unusual that the *event* is interesting even though readers are completely unacquainted with the name.

The paragraphs that follow deal more with the smaller-city news values than with those of the metropolis. The smaller city is the place the beginner must make his start; let him learn its ways first. Further, the news structures of metropolitan papers are affected enormously by "group interests." One publication is strongly conservative, and gives a speech about the banking situation a half-column; another paper, appealing to different readers,

gives its half-column to a police story unmentioned by the first paper. The Junctionville paper cannot limit itself to a certain reader group; it must appeal to "all" readers and hence it evaluates news in terms of the entire community rather than in terms of one or two segments.

### THE TEST OF NEWS

The reporter has one reasonably definite and universal test for news worth—the extent to which readers will identify themselves with the story. The more numerous and the more vigorously readers view a story as related to their own interests, the more valuable that story. The principal forms of news identification are six:

1. A happening in which the reader shared or participated. Such an event is strong news. Readers follow it for three reasons: to live it over again, if they enjoyed it or found it exciting and not too unpleasant; to obtain a more complete picture than they drew from their own participation; or to compare what they saw with what the reporter saw.

Last night's two-inch snowstorm was entirely normal for this time of year, but the temperature slid downward and the snow that at 1 A.M. was half rain had turned by 7 o'clock to a crusty coating, almost ice. Backing cars out of garages was slithery, skiddy work and dozens of fenders were creased. No one dared let his sidewalk go unattended, lest a pedestrian tumble and then file a lawsuit, but chipping away the ice was perspiring work and in this oil-burner age few householders had ashes available. Readers will consume every word of the weather story, to see whether they got more blisters from their shovel-work than did residents of other parts of the city.

2. An event which readers watched, though they did not take part in it. The July Fourth parade had nine blocks of marching units and was seen by 11,000 persons. Every one of the 11,000 will read the parade story, if only to see whether the reporter noticed the way the Garfield High School drum major swirled his baton twenty feet in the air and always managed to catch it, usually without breaking step.

3. News concerning a well-known person or place. Readers know few policemen, but Traffic Officer Murphy, at Main and Madison, is a city character because of his incessant flow of loud-voiced greetings and comments. Even a snowstorm can't silence Murphy's "Hi, doctor," "Nice car, buddy," "Your number plate's dirty, sister." When Officer Murphy leaves for vacation, he's news; hundreds of readers otherwise will wonder whether he is sick or has been given a new post.

4. News of a field parallel to one in which readers themselves are interested. This is an extension of the doctrine that "misery and joy both love company." The Baptists, Unitarians, Methodists, Roman Catholics, Presbyterians, and all other sectarians will be interested in the news that the Episcopalians have paid off and burned the mortgage on their church. That the Episcopalians are a "minority religion" in the city takes little luster from the news worth of their achievement.

5. A name gleaming with mystery, romance, intrigue, or other fascination. Mrs. Milo Daisch is of most modest prominence, if any, but her vacation took her to Hollywood and her account to the Women's Club about the movie studios and the stars she saw, though at 100-foot distance, will be read eagerly.

6. The news that interprets or clarifies a little understood action. This story is the one most in danger of being unappreciated. It suffers because, seemingly, it has "nothing new" or because "it's been covered already." True, it has been mentioned before, but its meaning and implications for one cause or another were not brought out; perhaps the news broke only a few minutes before the deadline and the reporter had insufficient time to do more than high-light the story.

Yesterday the paper announced that the electric light company will ask the state for permission to change its tariffs. The story listed the requested rates, but it came too late for an analysis showing which classes of customers would pay more or less, and how much more or less. A "second-day" story will be decidedly welcome.

7. News of "automatic" interest because it stirs or appeals to some trait or concern found in so many readers as to be "general" or even "universal."

Years ago the psychologists insisted that man was motivated strongly by "instincts" or automatic, inevitable responses to various stimuli. Man had an "instinct" for self-preservation; hence, when his canoe upset, he tried to swim, even though he never before had done so. The word "instinct" has largely vanished from the psychology books, but newspaper folk find the idea behind that word worth retaining.

Among the "automatically interesting" subjects is "conflict," or "struggle," or "competition." Football and basketball are such popular sports mainly because they so much emphasize "conflict." Baseball, requiring quite as much technical skill, calls less attention to the "struggle" aspect, and could not stand against the more "fighting" sports.

Yet reporters must guard against overestimating the worth of a "fight" story. Because "competition" enters into so many items of news, reporters are tempted to put the "fight" always in the first paragraph, though actually it may be an exceedingly minor aspect.

"Sympathy" is another instinct. An emotionally moving incident, well described, always is worth space, however trivial the happening may be. Associated Press once sent all over the country a 400-word story about the rescue of a dog caught between two buildings whose walls were only a few inches apart. Certainly, for it is an Anglo-Saxon characteristic to feel strongly for the unfortunate.

"Children" constitute another automatic-interest field, especially for readers old enough to be parents. "Animals" are high on the list of the always-interesting. High rank goes also to "romance," to "mystery," and to "sex." Exactly where the "instincts" stop, no one can say. To some extent they are regional; along the seaboard, as an example, a story of a ship in distress always is first-page news, even though few of the paper's readers earn their livings from maritime occupations. To those readers, nautical or landlubber, "the sea" is an automatic stimulus. In some arid sections, the ship story might require fortifying by other elements, such as "sympathy" for those in peril, before it would be top-column news.

One trouble, then, with using "instincts" as a complete guide to

news values lies precisely in that fact that no one knows when a response to a stimulus ceases to be "universal" or even "general." The psychologists themselves disagreed, and hence "instincts" came into disrepute. Yet they remain to newspaper folk a partial answer to the question, "About what are people willing to read?"

The list of "instincts" that one paper would approve might not align with the "instincts" valued by another publication. The first paper, slightly on the spectacular side, probably would grant eminence to such classifications as "adventure" and "heroism." The other, more restrained, though it might value "heroism," would give a more prominent front-page location to a "science" story about an almost miraculous surgery than to the "heroism" chronicle of a rescue made by firemen.

Then, too, many stories cannot be evaluated on an "instincts" basis because they overlap into several fields, and no one is too confident how to rank the "instincts." The account of the convicting of a grafting politician would classify in several pigeon-holes; it would have "a well-known name," that of the politician; "conflict," in the legal fighting in the court room; "government," by its essential nature; "crime," equally evident; "progress," in that an undesirable has been circumvented. Impinging upon all these fields, certainly it must be a superlative story. The same day will bring a story of the city council passing a \$475,000 order for a municipal water softener, sought for twenty years by half the residents and fought by the other half. There is less of simply comprehended action or quotation in the second story than in the first, yet the second story may receive the heavier play. Listing the "instincts" touched by each story, assigning them values, and then adding up the score, would be too artificial a means of determining their relative worth. Yet with the number of categories required for a reasonably inclusive list of "instincts," there would be no other method.

The common-denominator system of relating each story to the one peg of the extent to which readers will identify themselves with the news seems more natural.

Among the traditions that deserve longevity is the one that "names make news." The more names in a story, the better. A reader may find his own name—and the story mentioning him



becomes the most interesting in the paper—or he may see the names of neighbors, friends, even enemies. At least he will find names he recognizes. The list of those attending, at five dollars each, the banquet honoring the local fullback who “made” the first team of any of the dozens of All-American football elevens will be read at least as eagerly as the athlete’s stammering speech of appreciation.

### NEWS WITHOUT EVENTS

An event itself is news, but many a trifling event has become powerful news because of the way it was written. The “processing” of news remains one of the paper’s most valuable sales appeals; anyone can “report” a city council meeting, but often it requires a crackerjack to report it intelligibly and interestingly.

The notion that “something must happen” before news results is out of date. Trends, conditions, situations, and interpretations are news. That Seton Foster, president of the Foster Furniture Manufacturing Company, sees in the better business for his concern a reason to forecast generally improved business is news, although “nothing happened.”

What people are talking about or will talk about tomorrow is news. Ability to spot such topics, especially to spot them in advance, is the mark of a good reporter, of one who “knows people.” The murder in Westbrook seems without distinction, yet it may be talked about all over the state, and a reporter who can predict that it will be talked about has a strong story when he rummages in the files and finds that the Westbrook homicide is surprisingly parallel to a local killing of sixty years ago.

People talk about what they have seen. The best place to sell an extra edition about the burning of a hotel is at the fire lines while the crowds are watching the disaster. Hundreds of persons will buy papers, and then alternate between watching and reading. Forty minutes later, when another extra is issued, they will buy it, too.

### WORN-OUT TRADITIONS

Within every office there are certain fetishes, certain beliefs as to news values, that have been handed down from the molder-

ing past. The first person in the city to be hit by a street car was page 1 news; readers had been wondering ever since the trolleys began running, seventeen days ago, whether a man could be struck by one of them and survive. Now they know. But that was back in 1901; today busses have replaced all but a few trolleys. Yet the tradition persists that a person hit by a trolley gets his name on the front page, even if he was but slightly hurt. These fetishes had better be reëxamined; some remain valid, but others are worn out.

Most dangerous of the fetishes is the one that "heavy stuff" is weak news. This notion took shape during the First World War, when millions of Americans were examined for possible army duty. The psychologists had been clamoring to find out the national intelligence, and now they had their chance. Millions of men were run through an intelligence test, and the score for the nation was announced as a mental age of twelve years. Editors took this finding too seriously. They failed to discount it for the fact that many illiterates, nonreaders of newspapers, were included, and they failed to discount it for the fact that "twelve-year-old mental age" may mean a limit upon comprehension of intricate affairs rather than a limit upon interest in them. The only outstandingly successful tabloid in the country, the *New York Daily News*, discovered in the early 1930's, when the country was in the morass of an increasingly soggy depression, that the diet of frivolity it had been giving its readers did not satisfy them. The *News* fortified its hold upon the supposedly blase New Yorkers by offering them large gobs of sparkingly written economics, history, finance, and foreign affairs.

The desire for "lively" news has misled many a reporter. "Put some zip into it" has been accepted too zealously, notably in crime and scandal stories. Back in the Terrible Twenties, many a managing editor was too frantic in the scramble for circulation. In order to win a few more readers, he had reporters play sensational stories to the last lurid detail. Shocking stories of a shocking murder may have added a few hundred readers, but they alienated many thousands. The few hundred were mainly "fringe" readers, temporary and often too low in money to buy the goods advertised in the paper. Although "quality circula-

tion" is a dangerous phrase because it can be stretched too far, the "daily thrill" was equally dangerous and it brought newspapers far more enemies than friends.

### WAVES OF YELLOW

News sometimes runs in waves or cycles, which usually are entirely artificial. The police reporter writes a Thanksgiving Day story about the sneak thief who stole the Johnson family's turkey from the back-porch refrigerator. Ordinarily he ignores back-porch and clothesline thefts as too trivial, but this one, because of the Thanksgiving aspect, seemed an exception. He wrote it vigorously, and the news editor coöperated by ordering a sprightly, italic headline. "Ah hah," said the reporter to himself, "perhaps I've been overlooking a bet." The day after Thanksgiving, someone hung a dress suit on a line to air, and a prowler stole the sartorial splendor. Again the reporter wrote vigorously, and again the news editor called for a colorful headline.

Because twice in a week he had made the front page with a story in a category he usually overlooked, the reporter began chronicling at length all the back-porch thefts. Within a fortnight readers were talking about the "wave" of petty thievery and cautioning each other not to leave Junior's tricycle, muchly in need of paint and lubrication, on the back porch overnight lest it be stolen. Actually, there were no more of these minor thieveries than in the year before; this time, however, the reporter was writing about each of them, whereas earlier he had mentioned none.

Nationally, there have been four waves of sensational or "yellow" journalism. The first was in the late 1830's when James Gordon Bennett's New York *Herald* discovered in the sordid side of life more colorful copy than it found in rectitude. In the 1880's Joseph Pulitzer began another wave with his New York *World*, until its tragic death in 1931 always a lively paper and at that time somewhat calumnious. A few years later, Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst with his New York *Journal* ran a circulation battle culminating in the Spanish-American War story. Hearst and Pulitzer tried anything, and the more they could

startle or shock readers, the happier they were. Then in the 1920's the United States discovered the tabloids, though only after England's Lord Northcliffe threatened to start one in this country if Americans refused to establish a paper of the sort he had found so profitable in London.

Waves, however, don't last. The public wearies of them and prefers the "regular" journalism. Since the public edits the papers, the waves die. The fifth cycle of sensationalism is due at any time now. When it comes, conservative papers will have a hard time resisting concessions to the pyrotechnics of the yellows. Here and there, a managing editor will yield. Others will remember that one of the proudest papers in the northern Midwest, the Milwaukee *Sentinel*, lost its fame, its prestige, and its profit when it tried to meet a new competition by out-yellowing the yellow. It couldn't be done, and the *Sentinel* had to sell out to the yellow, and today has hard sledding against the Milwaukee *Journal* which met the same competition that crippled the *Sentinel* and beat it by becoming more and more quiet and dignified.

The fifth wave of yellow will be no more permanent than were its predecessors. The public will weary of it and will begin editing the papers by refusing to buy those that have become too wild.

It is not the managing editor or the city editor who is all-powerful in shaping a paper's views as to news vitality. The individual reporter, even the glaucous cub, makes the decisions. "This sort of story always is big news in this town," the executive proclaims. The reporter dissents, and tells himself, "Even if that's true, it shouldn't be." He can end the dominance of the stories he dislikes by writing other stories so well, and founding them upon such thorough fact-gathering, that, though he does not in the least neglect the executive's preference, he builds up the news he himself favors. It has been done time and again. The reporter who believes that church, or business, or school news is neglected can make that church, or business, or school news into "must" copy. The city editor knows he can.

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## NEWS STORY STRUCTURE

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### GOOD WRITING FOR BAD READERS

NEWSPAPER WRITING is as thorough a paradox as anyone could desire. It is as free as the north wind, yet it has a "standard form" or "standard structure" as definite as the formula for computing interest rates. For the young reporter, this duality is extremely helpful. While he experiments with words and builds his own style of expression, he plays safe by casting his stories into the standard structure. When he is a more emblazoned writer, he still uses the standard form frequently, particularly for straight news, but he knows when and how to depart from it in order to achieve a special effect.

This standard form is no sudden creation; it evolved slowly through the years. It is a good, workable form because it is realistic; it takes into account both the way a newspaper is read and the way it is written. It does so with a brutal and effective frankness.

The newspaper reader is the world's worst. He buys for two or three cents a product containing a story cabled from the Orient at a cost of two dollars or more a word, a dispatch from the remotest corner of Africa, and writings about his own city that kept a dozen reporters on the jump to prepare. His pennies give him anywhere from 50,000 to 150,000 words of reading matter. In book form, a novel of this length would cost him from two to three dollars. Does he appreciate that the newspaper is the day's best bargain?

Indeed he doesn't. He looks at it hurriedly, in the twenty-five or thirty minutes between his return from the office and his wife's

announcement that dinner is ready, and then tosses it aside. Perhaps he will pick it up later in the evening, but just as probably he will play bridge or go to the movies instead. Yet he would not think of dismissing the two dollar novel with such a running glance.

If he found himself too drowsy to follow the intricacies of the novel, he would set it aside until he was mentally more alert. Whatever his mental inappropriateness, he idles through the newspaper and if he absorbs little of its contents he is without regret, for there will be another paper tomorrow and he may feel more alert then.

The murder mystery he reads closely, if only to see whether he can pick the killer before the author reveals him. The newspaper, telling of the new income taxes he must pay this year, he looks at transiently, even listlessly. He has no serious purpose in looking at it; yes, he wishes to know "what happened today," but if he doesn't find out, he can do so from tomorrow's edition.

Because he paid two and a half dollars for it, he reads every word of the novel. He makes no attempt to read every word of the newspaper, or even of the half-dozen or so stories he "follows." Instead, he glances at a story with five or six focusings of the eyes and believes that he has plucked its contents. Strangely, he has; it was written so he could do exactly that.

#### STILL MORE HANDICAPS

Today's reading is silent, whereas that of two decades ago was aloud. Then, the household had comparatively little printed matter, and whoever had the best voice read aloud to the rest of the family. It rather had to be that way, for electric-light placement was such that the ordinary room had but one spot where the illumination allowed easy reading. Today, every member reads his own publication at the same time, and hence every member reads silently in order not to disturb the others. Today, a room has half a dozen floor or table lamps and everyone can have good light. The old, reading aloud had to be done carefully; to avoid mispronunciations, the reader had to look at every word. Nothing was missed. Today's silent reading has no such necessity; if the reader wishes to jump the last forty words of a paragraph,

no one will stop him. This is a strong handicap for the news writer to overcome.

Then, too, the news is sandwiched between compelling and alluring advertisements and pictures. The ads are adorned and bedecked; the pictures are the height of the cameraman's craft. All the story has to bid for attention is the quality of its writing.

Even this may be offset by the headline. If it is well written, many readers will obtain all they wish to know about the event and will survey none of the story, or at most only the top paragraphs.

The juggler in the far ring of a three-ring circus has no more of a struggle in attracting attention than has the average news story. Does this mean that the newspaper is regarded as valueless? Wait until the day when an angle bar on the press jams and the edition is fifty minutes late; from all over the city come telephoned queries, many of them angry, "Where's the paper?" "When'll we get it?" "What's the delay?" The newspaper is taken for granted, until it is late; then the public testifies how much it wants the paper. Yet the public tosses aside a million-dollar product after thirty-minute scanning. A most inverted world!

Still other conditions impinge upon the news writer. Chief among them is the narrowness of the newspaper column. It averages two inches. Most important, this, for it means that the paragraphs must be short, else the combination of narrowness and depth makes them illegible.

Another unfavorable factor is the size of newspaper type. This book is printed in 11/13 type, that is, each letter is on a base 11/72 of an inch tall and the base in turn is on a block 13/72 of an inch deep, so that there are 2/72 of white space between lines. Newspaper type may be as small as 7/7 with 8/8.5 as average large and 9/9.5 as notably big. Narrow columns and small type are so hard to read that the writing in a story must be superlative if the disadvantage is to be overcome.

#### THE REPORTER'S SITUATION

Consider next the personal burdens weighing upon the reporter. First, he must write rapidly, for the clock waits for no one, re-

ardless of how vital the story he is grinding out. The reporter writes correctly the first time, though he may have minutes enough to revise his chronicle once—but not the six or seven times the fiction writer takes to put his offering into marketable form.

An interpolation here. The supposed machine-gun rapidity of newspaper writing is largely myth. Now and then a story must be hammered out in a frenzied race with the clock, but such instances are unusual. The reporter who is always five minutes on the wrong side of the dial probably is a time-waster who squandered twenty minutes in gossip with a comrade before he got down to business.

### WRITE IT ON THE WALL

The instantaneousness of the reporter's work also is chimerical. A reporter strides in to the office, heaves his hat at a desk, thumps down in front of a typewriter and begins pounding it. "I wish I could write like that; it takes years of experience, I suppose." Be not so wistful. The reporter is writing about a meeting of the Kiwanis Club. He began writing that story long before he reached the office. While he attended the meeting and listened to the speeches, he planned his story. He experimented with phrasings and structures; he "wrote it on the wall" while he listened. On the way from hotel to office, he turned the story over in his mind. Now, back in the city room, his job is merely that of pulling down from cerebrum to fingertips the story he arranged during and immediately after that Kiwanis gathering.

In this spadework he asked himself a series of questions: How big is this story, two paragraphs or full column? What sort of reader will follow it, and what will that reader wish to know about it? Can it be made to appeal to other readers, and if so, how? How much background or explanation does the story require to be clear? Is it "news" or "entertainment," or both? How shall it be started? What parts are to be emphasized and what parts are so weak that they must be compressed? When he had answered these queries, his story was half-written, though he was still seven blocks and a cigaret from a typewriter.

Even so, the reporter is under pressure, for all it is not the crushing pressure that screen and novel depict. To deny that



pressure is to try painting the lily or whitening the snow, but to use that pressure as an excuse for weak writing is to cut one's professional throat.

"Now" is the reporter's Simon Legree, for this short little word wields a whip forever cracking about his ankles. A "literary" person can take a respite when he is jaded and satiated; he can postpone writing Chapter IX until he is in a more expressive frame of mind. The reporter has no tomorrow, nothing but a "now." His interview with the streets commissioner must be written immediately—"now"—whether he is in the mood for glistening words or whether he can think only in clichés. The story won't wait; hence the reporter gradually trains himself to write his best, irrespective of his mental eagerness or reluctance.

The publisher told the novelist to keep his pending murder mystery to "about 100,000 words," but said nothing when the manuscript ran to 120,000. The city editor says, "Half a column," and speaks with muriatic sarcasm if the story stretches to 575 instead of the prescribed 500 words. He may point to a story on the front page of the early edition and decree, "Write it to fit that space." The make-up editor removes the early edition story and lodges it on an inside page, and sends all of the late edition to the press except page 1, with its hole cleared for the "to come" relation. If the story is an inch short, make-up and city editors will bellow journalistic but impolite translations of lese majesty. The reporter learns to write to space, or he begins looking into the requirements and demands for insurance salesmen.

Then, too, the city council story this Tuesday may be of vastly different worth than the city council story of a week ago. A fiction writer knows that a certain magazine editor wants offerings of 3,600 words; whether the yarn be of bank bandits or of marooned mariners, it is to run 3,600. The reporter has no such stabilized requirement; today he would recount the end of the world in four paragraphs, and tomorrow he will be writing ten about stories that today wouldn't even get into the paper.

All these circumstances and conditions merge to make the reporter a writing craftsman, and a fine reporter a writing artist. The man or woman who cannot measure up does not advance. Yet the burden upon a reporter isn't crushing; he needs none of

Jove's thunderbolts in order to meet the competition. The "standard news structure" will see him through almost any difficulty.

### HIND-END-TO WRITING

This standard structure builds entirely out of a reversal of the rules for other kinds of writing. Other forms pick the end as the spot of highest emphasis, because these other writings are read leisurely and a sentence or a paragraph can progress safely to a climax at the finish. Since the newspaper is read hastily, the climax is at the start and the end contains the weaker material. Thus, if a reader merely glances down a column, his eyes fix upon the start of each paragraph, where they are drawn by the dab of white space marking the indenting. Seeing only the opening sentences, he nonetheless gets the most important material of each paragraph. Thereby he surveys a thousand-word story in about a minute and a half, and has an unbelievably full outline of it.

This upside-down emphasis carries through the sentence, the paragraph, and the entire story. Look now at a "regulation" sentence:

At the meeting of John W. Allen post, American Legion, held last night at Memorial Hall, it was voted unanimously to invite the Legion's state convention to meet in this city next year.

Only when the sentence is ending does a reader have more than a clue as to what it is about. Translate the sentence into newspaper language:

The American Legion state convention will be invited to meet in this city next year, John W. Allen post voted unanimously at its meeting last night at Memorial Hall.

What the post voted is more important than the time and place of the meeting. Newspaper English therefore puts the vote at the top of the sentence, and holds the lesser details until the end.

Newspaper writing aligns with "regular" writing in one respect. Each uses sentence-form to obtain "tone" or "flavor." Vivid, fast-moving action is told in short, jerky sentences; leisurely and thoughtful observations or comments are made in longer, flow-

ing sentences. A skillful reporter borrows "change of pace" from the baseball pitcher and keeps a story, especially a long one, from having too many sentences of about the same length. He mixes them, several short, one long, several short, or several long, one or two short, several long. Thus he minimizes the monotony of sentences too much alike. He carries the process another turn by employing as many grammatical variations as he can, as will be discussed in the chapter on speech reporting.

The reporter uses specific rather than general statements. He does not write:

There will be a special display on view all this week at the Henry H. Conklin Municipal Art Gallery.

Consider the only headline that could be written for this introductory sentence:

Art Gallery Offers  
A Special Exhibit

The worst quality of this distressingly poor headline is that it would apply to each of the year's fifty-two weekly special exhibits. Seeing this dull headline and the equally drab first sentence beneath it, a reader decides yawningly, "Oh, another special display at the art gallery. Always a special, isn't there? What movie do we want to see tonight?"

To avoid this reaction, the reporter translates from the general to the specific:

A display of water colors by nine of the city's high school students is on view this week at Henry H. Conklin Municipal Art Gallery.

This sentence tells three times as much as did the other, and therefore is three times as interesting. An individual headline, fitting this story and only this one, can be written for it. A good test of the quality of an opening sentence is whether a "once only" headline can be written from it. If not, the sentence is deficient.

#### STRUCTURE ANALYZED

The standard structure contains three parts: (1) the introduction or "lead"; (2) the catch-all or bric-a-brac division; and (3) the elaboration.

The lead works hard. It compresses into one or two paragraphs a concentration or summary of the whole story. Thereby it enables a reader to decide in a moment whether he wishes to follow through and pick up the details or whether a few words satisfy him. The lead is built upon six questions, "Who?" "What?" "Where?" "When?" "Why?" "How?" When these "five W's" have been answered, the story is outlined, every essential is told, and nothing remains to be given except details. Thus:

The city council (*Who*) abolished all-night parking on any municipal street (*What*), by an 8 to 2 vote (*How*) last night (*When*) at a special meeting (*Where*) at which action was recommended by the traffic committee (*Why*).

This effectively high-spots the story having one dominant and outstanding facet. If other aspects, though secondary, are of high interest or importance, they are summarized in a "secondary lead":

The council also rejected, 7 to 3, Police Chief Daniel Donahue's request for six more policemen and \$1,700 for three new cruiser cars. Two licenses to sell bottled beer and one barroom permit were granted. The council received a petition from 47 Castle Park residents asking that Jeffers and Thomas Streets be paved.

Thus, in two paragraphs, four principal actions have been presented in brief. Division of the lead into top-lead and secondary is far preferable to an attempt to jam an entire bushel of information into one paragraph. Such an effort as this is hard to understand without two or three readings:

The city council abolished all night parking on any municipal street, by an 8-to-2 vote at a special meeting held last night, when action was asked by the traffic committee, and then turned down, 7 to 3, the request of Police Chief Daniel Donahue for six more policemen and \$1,700 for three new cruiser cars, granted two licenses to sell bottled beer and one to run a barroom, and received a petition from 47 residents of the Castle Park district, asking that Jeffers and Thomas Streets be paved.

Aside from being so long that it is optically dismaying, this cumbersome lead demands that a reader keep in mind so much in-

formation that he has forgotten the first part before he reaches the final bit. It is aptly nicknamed the "hell-diver lead." Frequently, however, a one-paragraph lead can be used to embrace more than one action:

The city council abolished all-night parking on any municipal street, by an 8-to-2 vote at a special meeting last night, and rejected, 7 to 3, Police Chief Daniel Donahue's request for more men and cruiser cars.

Notice that in this "combination lead," some of the details that were in the two-paragraph lead have been dropped, for brevity, and cannot be told until the details are reached.

A combination lead sometimes takes a statistical form, not at all sparkling but high in coherence:

The city council transacted four pieces of business at a special meeting last night:

1. It abolished all-night parking on any municipal street, by a vote of 8 to 2.
2. It turned down Police Chief Daniel Donahue's request for six more policemen and \$1,700 for three new cruiser cars, by a 7-to-3 vote.
3. It granted two licenses to sell bottled beer and one permit to run a barroom.
4. It received a petition from 47 residents of Castle Park district, asking that Jeffers and Thomas Streets be paved.

Though some city editors are hostile, the numbered list is so valuable in obtaining clarity and coherence that it deserves more frequent use. To overcome these city editors' objections, the story can be given a vigorous one-facet lead, followed by the numbered list:

The city council abolished all-night parking on any municipal street, by an 8-to-2 vote last night at a special meeting at which action was recommended by the traffic committee. During brief debate, the proposal was condemned as giving the police too much power and defended as a fire-protection step.

The council also:

1. Rejected, by a 7-to-3 vote, Police Chief Daniel Donahue's request for six more policemen and \$1,700 for three new cruiser cars.

2. Granted two licenses to sell bottled beer and one license to operate a barroom.

3. Received a petition from 47 residents of Castle Park, asking that Jeffers and Thomas Streets be paved.

Thus, within the boundaries of a basically simple structure, the reporter can present a quantity of information compactly, and yet with such freedom of organization that he does not suck every story through the same siphon.

### THE CATCH-ALL

The second element of the standard structure is the catch-all or minor-mention bracket. Here various odds and ends, individual rather than directly related to the principal news, are herded together:

Alderman George Simonson, who has been in the hospital for an operation, attended the meeting, his first in 11 weeks. City Clerk Ralph J. Downer was directed by Mayor W. J. Lasher to pass the cigars—"and no two-for-fivers, either"—when he announced the arrival of a daughter yesterday morning. The next meeting will be the regular gathering listed for the 26th.

The old practice was to dump in the catch-all at the very end of the story, in the belief that its information was so slight that it should not interfere with the major news. Later, and better, practice has it follow the lead. This is safer, for the last paragraph always is in danger of being discarded if the make-up editor must do some shortening because his type exceeds his space. Usually he drops the last paragraph without reading it, as he is confident that the tail of a story is its weakest part. If the catch-all is at the end, its information is lost completely, since it is not mentioned elsewhere. With the catch-all higher, it is safe, and what is sacrificed will be details of a topic already well elaborated.

Particularly in accounts of meetings at which programs are given, the catch-all should come early. Often the only reward that the performers receive is to have their names in the paper. When Dan Dunning recited "Gunga Din" he was an important part of the program, despite the fact that the talk by Lieutenant Governor Simpson on "What's Wrong with Taxes" took most of the story. To omit Dan Dunning until the last paragraph, and

then perhaps kill him off because the type ran an inch too long, is unappreciative. Moreover, to many readers, who know Dan or know of him, "Gunga Din" was at least as interesting as the talk on taxes.

Metropolitan papers often omit the catch-all entirely. Their justification is that the persons it mentions are not well enough known to a sufficient number of readers to compensate for the cost of setting the type. This is entirely in line with the big-city viewpoint that the unexpected or the spectacular is news but that the ordinary or the familiar is not. The reporter in a small- or medium-sized city who omits the catch-all makes enemies for his paper, or at least hostile critics, of everyone who should have been mentioned in it. "That reporter tells everything about what that old goat from Washington said in his speech, but he doesn't mention that I sang and had to give four encores."

#### ELABORATING THE LEAD

The skeleton assembled, the story now puts flesh on the bones by expanding the lead, presenting details impossible to crowd into the first paragraph:

Abolition of all-night parking was voted after a 20-minute debate. Only Aldermen George Marsh, Ward 1, and Franklin Wright, Ward 3, voted in opposition.

Condemning the proposal as giving the police too much power, Mr. Marsh said. . . .

"The whole thing is needless," Mr. Wright argued. "We have no parking problem at 5 A.M. . . ."

The proposal is a fire-safety measure, Alderman Richard A. Johnson, Ward 4, said. He declared it. . . .

Alderman Dean Ryan, Ward 1, defended the police, saying. . . .

The items listed in the secondary lead are expanded now, if they merit such extended treatment, and are presented in the same order in which they appeared in the secondary lead:

1. Chief Donahue explained his request for more men and cars, introduced at the last meeting. He said, . . .
2. The bottled beer licenses were granted to the Elmdale grocery, Edgar Bersk, proprietor, 171 Harrison Street, and. . . .
3. The Castle Park petition was presented by a delegation led by Mrs. Roscoe Hilliker, 804 Orleans Street, who said, . . .

North American newspaper folk are pouter-pigeon proud of this standard story structure. Newspapers elsewhere haven't stolen it. An English publication, for example, is entirely willing to present a two-column story in chronological sequence, compelling readers to trudge through 2,000 words of type before they discover that the attempt to increase the income taxes finally was passed.

The standard structure is an effective answer to the discouraging conditions under which newspapers are read. It offers information in the concentrated hurry that readers desire, yet it has a place for the details. From the reporter's viewpoint, the structure is almost angelic, for its mechanics in no fashion interfere with his individuality in expression and his range in word choice. He can follow the structure implicitly, yet without sacrificing a syllable of the personality that marks his stories as apart and different from those of the other staff members. The only spot of regimentation is in the fondness for casting sentences and paragraphs with inverted emphasis, the strongest part first. Other than this, newspaper writing in no wise infringes upon a reporter's literary elbowroom, and this one infringement does not cramp him.

Writing within the standard structure may be bothersome at first, simply because it is something new. As familiarity increases, the difficulty vanishes. Its disappearance can be hastened by resorting to the old high-school device of outlining. Make a list of the items to be treated. Choose the best one for the lead, and the two or three next best for the secondary lead. Arrange the remaining items in their proper sequence for expansions of the lead and the secondary lead. If any items are left over, either they will be good enough for the catch-all or so trivial that they trail at the end of the story. Of course no reporter relishes going back to a high-school device; the mediocre refuse to do it. The better ones put their pride in their pockets and use the outlining system until they are so well acquainted with it that they outline stories in their minds instead of on paper. Whether the outlining be done with the brain muscles or those of the wrist, done it is, for all that an experienced reporter may



need but a moment for the process. Without this preplanning, a 500-word story will be either chronological, and probably slow-motion, or it will be an incomprehensible mess.

### THE IMPORTANT FIRST LINE

Wary lest he become "regimented," a young reporter tries to emancipate himself by writing leads that are "different." Usually they are at best unconventional and at worst fluky. Often they are needless. The bigger the news, the more it tells itself. Only a thin story needs reinforcing in order to attract readers. The reinforcing can be made without departing from the standard structure. It consists solely of a "first-line feature," a sparkling bit jammed into the first six words.

This feature is not a stunt or contortion of diction, a twisting of words. It is the use of a facet of the event that the reporter saw or learned about, but one that the ordinary observer would miss. The automobile accident was completely routine: skid, telephone pole, bruises. One paragraph will tell it all. The crowd that swarmed around to see the debris soon disperses. "Wasn't much. I don't think the fellow was hurt; his car wasn't smashed very bad." The reporter is a better observer. On the floor of the car was a bowl holding five goldfish. The smash upset the bowl and the goldfish died. There is his first-line feature:

Five goldfish were killed and one man was slightly bruised when . . . .

The fire was only the ordinary chimney blaze. The firemen didn't even unfold their hose. It won't be much of a story, except for the fact that the aging dog asleep on the kitchen floor didn't waken despite the firemen's door-banging and heavy footsteps. If the canine Rip Van Winkle is told about in those all-important first six words, readers will give the story much more attention than they would otherwise.

Notice, and remember, that the first-line feature is based upon observation and fact-gathering rather than upon literary legerdemain. It comes from seeing more than did the other observers.

To try to substitute for it some word-wrenching is time wasted, and is also a confession that the reporter was too lazy to dig hard enough to exhume a genuine first-line feature.

#### NINE "VERBOTENS"

As helps toward more forceful writing, the reporter compiles a list of things to avoid. The list has nine items:

1. Avoid overcrowding the lead sentence. The five *W*'s are all it can cram in without exploding. Minor details must be held until later. Look at this terrible example:

Henry W. Winch, eight, of 212 North Street, a pupil in the second grade of Cleveland School, whose father is a foreman for the Wales Rubber Company, drowned this morning soon after 10 o'clock when he fell off a homemade raft he had built from boards and planks he found on the shore, 60 feet from the west shore of Hogan's pond in the Greenbush district, in water that Police Lieut. Henry A. Moriarty said, after measuring it with a pole, was only four feet deep.

Everything is in this sentence except the time of the funeral, and the overloading is so enormous that coherence is gone entirely. These details are good, every one of them, but not for the lead sentence.

2. Avoid complicated, rambling sentences. Usually they are signs of inadequate thinking. The illustrative sentence in the first item can be cured by thinking it through and distinguishing between information important enough for the lead and information so minor it must await a later presentation.

The newspaper column makes long paragraphs unwelcome. One line of typewriting makes two lines of type, and reporters agree that a normal paragraph need not run more than six typed lines. The cross-country sentence will make paragraphs far too long.

3. Rule out the sentence that opens with unimportant, explanatory words, especially the time:

At 8 o'clock tonight, at the high-school auditorium, the members of the senior class will have their annual fall dance.

This inverted, periodic sentence makes a reader wait until the

end to find out what happened or is to happen. This habit of writing is a sure sign of immaturity. High-school papers abound with it.

4. Don't begin with a generality, such as "plans for," "work is progressing on," or "the purpose of." Pin it down; make it definite, by telling what the plans are, how much work has been done, or what the meeting will do.

5. Avoid the figure beginning. "A crowd of 27,500" means almost nothing, because so few readers can visualize the statement clearly enough to appreciate how large such a throng would be.

6. Don't begin with a blurb, such as "presence of mind this morning saved the life of. . . ." Again, no one can visualize presence of mind. Tell how the presence of mind was manifested, what the quick thinker did.

7. Don't waste principal, independent verbs on secondary, subordinate clause actions:

Although he swam to shore, Burke's teeth chattered from the cold.

The syntax suggests that whether he drowned is an incidental, that the really important information is that Burke's teeth rattled. Such a sentence puts the emphasis in the wrong place.

8. Keep sentences from beginning with the same letter or word. A succession such as "The," "The," "The," "The," "The," is killinglly monotonous. Obtain variety by changing the syntax.

9. Keep such a backhanded, indirect, and sleepy expression as "there is" and "there are" away from the top of a sentence. Such writing is stodgy.

Says some patronizing ignoramus who doesn't know a lead from a linotype, "Newspaper work must be fascinating; one meets such interesting people. But tell me, isn't the writing fearfully monotonous?" If the critic is right, the reporter has only himself to blame.

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## 8

# COVERING SPEECHES

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### TAKING NOTES

THE CUB didn't recognize it, but the city editor gave him an orchid when he said, "Harry, there's a ton of quotation marks at Lincoln High School tonight; Senator McGarry is going to tell why he voted to boost the gasoline tax two cents a gallon. Give us a good story."

An optimist, this city editor who turns loose upon a voluble senator a cub of only two months' drying, for speech reports often are among the poorest items in the paper. They should be among the best, for every speech presents a chance to show individuality, resourcefulness, and thoroughness. Part of the difficulty comes from the fact that the old-timers often hog the lively speeches and the youngsters hear the dreary ones that aren't much good even when well reported.

Nonetheless, whether it be with only P. T. A. and Sixth Ward Civic League orators, the newcomer who can do speeches impresses the city editor. He has an ability that the executive expects to find only after the reporter has been kiln-dried for a year or more.

Covering a speech may seem to be maple syrup, but it is one of the most exacting of the reporter's works. Anyone can paraphrase a speech; to report it largely by direct quotes, and have their 200 words reflect accurately the speaker's 6,500, is much harder. Many new reporters simply cannot do it.

Speech reporting, however, is splendid training. It requires little chasing after facts and offers unlimited opportunity to show

ability and quality in writing. Worry not at all because some cadaverous pessimist shakes his head and says, "Now if you only knew shorthand. . . ." Admittedly, the reporter would have an easier time if he did know shorthand, but except in the rarest instances he can travel comfortably without it. If he has the energy, he can invest it profitably in learning a supersimplified, ten-lessons-and-you-know-it shorthand. To master shorthand as must the stenographer probably isn't worth the weeks of effort it requires.

Speeches give the girl reporter one of her best chances to show that she is a better workman than some of the men who have hung around the office so long that the publisher is ready to charge them room rent. Many men, particularly the younger men, think that ability to do good speech reports is unmasculine. They scorn such work, and do it perfunctorily. Edith, anxious for a reputation as a quality reporter, adopts speeches as the quickest way of convincing the city editor that she is the best newcomer he has hired in ten years.

Edith is assigned to better and better speeches. The Tarzan-muscled lads speak a bit disparagingly of her "thousands of quotation marks." Then the Governor comes to town, to talk to the Rotary Club ladies' night. The State House reporter sends a warning: "This is going to be a hot speech; he's going to tell why he's having such a wrestle with the Legislature."

"I suppose I'm down for the Governor's talk," suggests Dave, the politics reporter, hoping he doesn't betray how eager he is to get the assignment.

"It's an evening story, so I can't expect to dodge it," hints Frank, whose regular beat includes the Rotary Club.

"I haven't done any penance for a while; I suppose this is my turn," angles Fred, who gets more by-lines than anyone else.

"You boys don't need to worry," the city editor answers easily, injecting a trifle of yawn. "I can't send any also-rans to this speech. Edith will do it for us."

Two long moments of thick silence. Then three masculine voices mutter in surprised unison, "Well, I'll be . . ."

They will be, but they asked for it.

## OF COURSE COLLEGE IS WORTH WHILE

The reporter already has the beginnings of a shorthand system. Taking notes in his freshman classes was a headachy chore; there were too many long words. Sophomore year, he began abbreviating. He discovered that the Greek letter Sigma was a workable symbol for "science" or "scientific" and Psi for "psychology" and "psychologist." In English 30, the survey of English literature, he wrote "Sh" for Shakespeare and "Ww" for Wordsworth. When senior year came, he had 150 to 200 symbols with which he could tame the lectures of every professor except the dapper little historian just over from Scotland, the fellow who always called it "Scohtlun" and mispronounced everything else with equal enthusiasm.

The reporter can transfer a few of these symbols directly into newspaper work. The "E" that he used for "economics" can be salvaged. Though most of the old campus abbreviations are dead now, he can speedily build a new list that will fit his present circumstances. "Republicans" he will mention in his notes simply as "R" and "dictator" shrinks to "dt." Thus, without a single curlicue of a formal shorthand, he is well started.

But he doesn't know how to take notes. He never learned to do so in college, which was the main reason why he went to summer school to work off the flunk in freshman math. "How come I don't know how to take notes? I've got about a dozen books full of them."

Surely, and look now at one of those books. Choose at random. From the notes for English 12, American Literature, pick a jotting about John Greenleaf Whittier:

Childhood—legends and tradition. Nature descriptions. Send laundry home. Frame of a picture.

This is an actual sample. Try to expand the jottings, and the reason they are deficient will be at once evident. "Childhood—legends and traditions." Does this mean that Whittier during his childhood listened thirstily to all the stories and yarns the old timers would tell him about colonial and pioneer days and thus became saturated with the spirit of earlier decades, or does it mean

that childhood was his favorite subject matter and that community and regional legends were his next most prolific topic? It might mean either. "Nature descriptions." Yes, what about them, did he do them well or badly, did he write of nature for her own sake or did he see nature simply as a background for the more interesting drama of persons? "Frame of a picture." There are a dozen possible meanings for this entry.

When these notes were taken, the student expected that forever more their few words would recall completely, vividly, and accurately the many words of professorial lecturing for which they are symbols. But their usefulness depends upon remembering the things they don't mention and combining these remembered items with the fragmentary notes—and time with disheartening rapidity corrodes memory. These notes are so incomplete as to be useless now.

"Granted," someone objects, "but a reporter's notes don't go into the icebox for twenty years or so; they're used within a few hours, before erosion has smoothed away the memory. Surely a reporter can remember contexts and restrictions five or six hours." A logical argument, this, but it doesn't work. Before he gets to transcribing from his notes, they may have grown to cover material for seven or eight stories rather than one story.

### GUESSING GAMES

Even as regards the one story, the splintery notes so soon reveal a number of possible double meanings, and the reporter can't for the life of him remember which meaning the speaker employed. Each seems appropriate. The notes deal with a speech made before an old-age pension society, and say: "Action in 6 mos." The speaker mentioned the hostility in Congress to the pension plan his organization sponsors and said that the "enemy" was preparing a well-financed attack. He also said that the pension-seekers must be ready to turn the thumbscrews on their congressmen. To which tangent does the "action in 6 mos." belong? Here are the possibilities:

A direct and vigorous attack upon the Utopia Today pension plan will be opened within six months by its enemies, John W. Garbisch warned at a meeting of. . . .

Advocates of the Utopia Today pension plan will give Congress six months in which to adopt it, and then will open a direct attack upon congressmen who oppose the plan, John W. Garbisch predicted today at a meeting. . . .

The stories will be alarmingly divergent, and that half-kneaded reference in the notes suggests one story quite as much as the other. "I ought to be able to remember which way he meant it," the reporter laments. Mr. Garbisch, sadly, is now on a train, headed for his next speech, and can't be reached for an elucidation. So the reporter plays it safe and writes about only those fragments of the speech that he does remember clearly. "Jack," the city editor protests as he scans the story, "this is stale stuff. I thought this Garbisch was a fire-eater. Didn't he say anything with a crackle in it?"

After the city editor has asked three or four such questions, the reporter protects himself by taking notes in full-sentence form. Then there is no slightest chance that he will misconstrue or fail to remember. The full-sentence note has one and only one meaning. It can't tangle a reporter. "Pension foes will start attack in 6 mos."

If the notes for English 12 had been taken in full sentences, reviewing for the final examination would have been more effective and the course would have yielded an A instead of a B. If the notes on the pensioneer's speech had been in full sentences, the city editor would have exclaimed, "Fine story, Jack. It goes on page 1."

This one simple device of equipping each note with subject, verb, and object lifts note-taking from a random and futile work to a precise and helpful endeavor. This one simple device makes the difference between an accurate story and one so shaky that the city editor next day gets a dozen telephoned complaints about the way "your paper made a mess of our meeting."

Taking full-sentence notes does not demand *long* sentences. Articles and many modifiers can be omitted and abbreviations can be used. Thus:

W. war was worst blunder in H. No ntn. won, evbdy. lost, U.S. espy.



This translates immediately into, "The World War was the worst blunder in history. No nation won; instead everybody lost, the United States especially."

Admitted also that many seasoned reporters take extremely sketchy notes. These reporters, however, have listened to millions of words and through long practice have developed memories that absorb a speech with the fidelity of a phonograph record. What these reporters can do and what the inexperienced reporter can do are very, very different. A true crackerjack can reproduce from eight or ten four-word jottings a column and a half of direct quotation, so accurately done that it varies from the speaker's manuscript only by the omission of one adjective and the substitution of one comma for a semicolon. For the youngster to try this memory reporting is altogether out of the question.

#### LISTENING IS AN ART

Go back now to the English 12 notebook. How did that "send laundry today" direction get into the book? Easily and naturally, and it illustrates a second difficulty for the reporter. When the student reminded himself that he must get the laundry into the mail today if he expected to have clean shirts next week, he was not absorbedly interested in what the professor was saying about Mr. Whittier. He didn't care whether Mr. Whittier was an immortal or a Grub-streeter; he was interested chiefly in the fact that after fourteen more minutes of droning, the "prof" would stop and it would be time for lunch. When the thought about the laundry strayed into mind, the student nonchalantly recorded it, probably without realizing that it had nothing to do with Skipper Ireson's ride.

Reporters sometimes do the same thing. "What's the speech all about?" the reporter asks the city editor. "Archeology in Syria." A groan. The reporter traipses listlessly into the lecture hall, sits far in the rear and gazes at the ceiling. Looks like a piece of plaster over there was nearly ready to drop. Might hit someone and knock him out. That'd be a good touch for the story.

Americans have invested a million and a quarter dollars in archeology in Syria, and in less than ten years have made from

that investment a direct profit of more than ten million dollars. It was a good business.

Huh, what was that about ten million dollars? What was the rest of that; hades, I missed it. Well, I'll catch it the next time he says anything good. Wonder how many years since they've scrubbed off that chandelier. Chuck wants me to play golf Sunday; maybe it'll rain and let me out.

Because of archeology in Syria, we drive our automobiles on gasoline costing 20 cents a gallon instead of a dollar.

That sounded pretty good; hades again, I missed most of it.

Surely the reporter missed most of it. He hasn't learned how to listen, and until he does learn, his note-taking will be crude and inaccurate. The only way to take notes on a speech is to hear it all, and this requires premeditated, conscious listening effort. Sitting slouchedly, thinking of other things, and hearing a snatch once every six or seven minutes won't provide notes that build into a good story. To take adequate notes, the reporter must hear every sentence; to hear every sentence, the reporter must be interested in the speech. This interest may be as counterfeit as a tinfoil half-dollar, but it must be achieved.

"So I have to hoodwink myself that he'll say something worth hearing?" Put it that sourly if need be; it is the truth. Listening is hard work, and the reporter is probably the only person in the room who will do that hard work. The others in the audience will hear a quarter or a third of the speech, and then turn to the newspaper to find out about the chunks they missed. The others are present because they wish to be, and it is their privilege to miss most of the speech. The reporter is there because he's paid to be, and he cannot miss anything. If, to ensure that he does hear it all, he must mesmerize himself into the belief that the speech is interesting, let him go hypnotic. His story thereby may land on the front page.

Once a reporter begins forcing an interest in what he expects to be a dreary speech, he finds to his amazement that the address really is enjoyable. Those old Syrians were lively fellows, after all, and the modern archeologists are clever chaps. That lad who ran out of gasoline twenty miles from nowhere used his brain in

figuring a way to avoid hiking to the nearest village, where probably there wasn't any gasoline anyway.

Until he has prodded himself a few times into being interested, the advice to do so seems far-fetched and fantastic; after he makes the experiment he realizes that the advice was valid. Yes, for it is rooted deep in psychology. The blase, motion-picture reporter, yawning and drowsy, films nicely but he writes screamingly poor speech stories.

### STEALING THE SPEAKER'S SIGNALS

Another assistance in note taking is to become acquainted with the speaker's mannerisms, both of action and of diction. Every speaker has certain trademarks. Ten minutes of attentive listening and watching show what they are, and from then on the reporter can tell before he says it whether the lecturer is about to voice a central idea or only a routine bit. One speaker introduces a climactic sentence by turning his gaze entirely across the audience, trying to catch his listeners' eyes and focus them upon him just before he reaches his strong passage. Another warns that he is approaching a new division of his subject matter by clearing his throat; at no other time does he do so. A third speaks for two minutes without looking at his manuscript, but always reads directly from it when he comes to the high-powered passages. A fourth holds a stance throughout a topic, but shifts when he progresses from item 3-c in his outline to 3-d.

Watching these peculiarities, which vary with each speaker, the reporter knows what is coming next and can be prepared to listen hardest when the signal is given that the next sentence or two will be of particular value.

Speech making is somewhat standardized. Knowing its technique, the reporter thereby is helped in his note taking. Determining what to expect from a speaker is easy if the speaker is a "professional," whose business includes or emphasizes the making of addresses. The touring lecturer, the executive secretary of a chamber of commerce, and the spokesman for an interest-group such as a manufacturers' association, all these have as an important part of earning their living the necessity of frequent speeches. Either they learn how to speak well or they hunt new

work. For each of these professional speakers, the great goal of life is to be interesting. If they cannot capture, or at least captivate, audiences, their "messages" are unheard, no matter how vital. These speakers have studied crowd psychology and have developed a technique workable anywhere. They have to do this, since Monday the audience may be a Rotary club in a conservative urban city and Tuesday may be a farmers' group in a class-conscious rural area.

### SPEECH STRUCTURE

Though he changes its details markedly in various addresses, such a speaker has a general structure fitting all or most of his speeches. He knows that in the first few minutes he will have the attention, though not necessarily the sympathy, of his audience. His listeners wish to know what sort of a fellow he is, lively or boring, easy to listen to or hard to hear. In these first few minutes, the speaker tries to implant the idea that what he has to offer is either interesting or important, and preferably both. He works also to win the audience's good will.

He does these dual jobs in one or both of two ways: (1) He tells some good yarns to make the audience laugh, for a jovial audience is "with" the speaker. (2) He outlines, either by direct statement or by implication, the nature of his talk. Whether he uses both devices depends on his analysis of the audience; sometimes he is content to employ only one device. The reporter can count on this first part of the speech being largely stage setting. From it he can obtain at most an outline of the speaker's yet-to-come arguments and contentions, plus a preview of the mannerism, gestures, and voice inflections characteristic of the lecturer. He does not expect to get most of his quotes from this part of the talk, though he may pick up a few, flashily phrased and used as bait to stimulate interest in what is to follow. This is the time to study the speaker and see what his methods may be.

Among the items to be caught are the speaker's pet expressions. The reporter will use these in giving his story authenticity and individuality. Every speaker has certain word devices or diction preferences; putting them into the story gives the report a much more realistic chronicle. For instance, one speaker has

"Heaven forfend" as a trademark phrase. Spotting this phrase, the reporter jots it down and with it the time-saving abbreviation he will use in his notes, such as "Heaven forfend (HF)." Later, when the speaker is imploring Providence, the reporter merely marks in "HF." The reporter studies the speaker's sentence and paragraph structure, to see whether the weighty bits come at the front or the end. If the hall is one to which he is a stranger, the reporter tests its acoustics, and, perhaps, changes his seat. In brief, he uses the first few minutes to become acquainted with the speaker, just as the speaker is using them to become acquainted with the audience. The speaker, as an example, is directing bright or provocative remarks to various parts of his audience to see from which section he can count on the most active response, with its nodding of heads and murmurs of "Yes, sir, that's right," when he comes later to his focal arguments.

Acquainted now with his audience and having warmed it as much as he can into the right frame of mind, the speaker gets down to business. He knows that it is a rare audience that can, or will, listen with unremitting attention to sixty or even forty-five minutes of talk. Sooner or later, attention will dilute, amid a wave of shuffling feet and suddenly asthmatic throats. Listening is truly hard work; after about so much of it, a person gives up, whispers to his companion, or begins looking at the ceiling. The speaker expects that, and adjusts for it. He does so in a very definite arrangement of his material.

Let us say that he has seven main points to administer. He knows that not all seven will be heard with equal attention. He puts at the start a good one, or two good ones, to be implanted before the audience relaxes too much after the preliminary pleasantries. He expects that when these first two points have been cared for, the audience will be nearly saturated and will dehydrate by coughing, conversing, and assorted discourtesies. During this time of inattention, the speaker presents the three topics he regards as least significant, so that the audience in its squirming-in-the-seats moments will lose the least of his address.

GUILTY consciences begin pricking all over the hall at about the same time. Every listener realizes that he has missed much of what the speaker said in the last thirteen or fourteen minutes,

and realizes also that his intermittent attention was rude. "I'll listen hard from now on." The speaker counts on this, and closes with his two most powerful and staccato doctrines. He has saved them until the end, because audience attention is greater then than at the start, when the listeners were more interested in assaying the lecturer himself than in assessing his arguments.

Because the reporter must master the speech in its entirety, to be able to make intelligently the inevitable compression into a quarter column or half column, he cannot share in the throat-clearing period. He must listen just as hard during this middle part of the talk as at any other. If he does not listen hard, he draws from the talk only the incomplete and sometimes incoherent comprehension of the average member of the audience. He takes notes quite as briskly during the middle of the speech as at the end, though he does not expect during these sixth-inning doldrums to find the material with which to lead his story. It is from the final division of the speech that he expects to draw the most powerful and revealing statements.

#### MINISTERIAL SPEECHES

Ministers are nearly a class in themselves. Some of the elder generation regard a congregation as duty-bound to listen to a sermon, whether or not it is interesting, and refuse to adapt their other public addresses to the fact that these other audiences are "voluntary" rather than "compulsory." These ministers are quite as likely to pop their most important points in the middle of a talk as at the end.

The younger preachers had a different training; they learned in theological school that a minister can draw a person into church but that doesn't mean that he will listen to the sermon. The sermon must be so compelling that the man who came only because his wife made him will be attracted, despite himself, and will listen. These ministers follow the technique of the "professional speaker" in their sermons and also in their other public talks. This classification of ministers inevitably has many exceptions; not all the septagenarians are amorphous lecturers and not all the younger men scintillate. The classification is a generalization and must be viewed as such.

Many an address, especially a sermon, deals with a subject apparently remote and of historical interest if of any at all. The minister, for instance, is preaching about George Fox, the Quaker, as part of a series of sermons on "Great Religious Leaders of the Past." Fox's time seems completely apart from this day of television and trimotored planes. George Fox, viewed entirely as a great figure in the past, will add little luster to the minister's reputation as a strong speaker. He must bring Fox up to date, and the favorite device is a link with the present. This link may demand only two sentences, but it will be there.

George Fox, arrested sixty times, had as hard a life as any man in today's shell-shocked world, yet he remained calm and undisturbed. In his refusal to let the pressures of his times wear him out, and destroy his nervous balance, he gave us a hint that we should use today. We can withstand the strain of today's distressing world if we will practice the inward calmness that was George Fox's.

Not especially glittering, this link with the present, but it helps the faithful to say, "I never miss one of Mr. Thrush's sermons; they are always *so* helpful." Yes, helpful to Mr. Thrush's reputation and also to the reporter. A newspaper reader has no inherent and driving interest in George Fox; he must be shown why he should read of a man, dead since 1691, before he turns to the sports page to find out why the Green Bay Packers had the short end of Sunday's 14 to 10 score. Mr. Thrush helped make Fox important by showing that he had a message for today, and the reporter will do the same thing. Whether or not he uses this link with the present for his lead, the reporter will have it in the story.

Experienced speakers always include in a talk before an "average" audience on an ancient, deadly recondite, or intricate subject a paragraph or two of link with today, simplification, or summary. This is what the listener to whom the subject was particularly uninteresting or abstruse will remember; the speaker will not leave that listener without at least one bit into which he can sink his mental teeth. This passage for the unenthusiastic listener is also a splendid passage for the reporter; it is very probably the skeleton of his story. He mustn't miss it; if he does miss it, he has some informing facts about why the Phoeni-

cian civilization perished, but nothing with which to compete with the Green Bay Packers story.

The greenhorn speaker, making his first address and, if he can run fast enough, his last, cannot be predicted. What he will do simply cannot be foretold. The mannerisms he used in the first five minutes, while he was so scared he couldn't look at the audience, may or may not be those he will display when finally he has discovered that his listeners are too polite to bite him. How he will present his argument cannot be forecast. The reporter won't be surprised if the first two minutes of oration give him the lead for his story. He does not rely on catching something in the last five minutes to make a lead.

#### THE CAT-AND-MOUSE SPEECH

Now and then a speaker enjoys tormenting the reporter by withholding until the last gasp anything that could make a lead. A university president recounts interestingly but not newsily the Cincinnati flood he survived a few years ago. Good stuff this, but the flood journalistically is ages old and was described in detail at the time. Writing a quarter-column on this postdeluvian résumé seems entirely hopeless. At squirmingly long last, the prexy smiles at the reporter and divulges the lead for the story: "We learned many things at Cincinnati that spring, but the most important was that democracy will work if you give it a chance. Show them what is needed, and why it is needed, and the citizens will respond." Murmurs the reporter to himself, "Providence be praised; now I have something on which to hang all this ancient history. Thanks, Dr. Prex, but why didn't you say that before I was so near heart failure?"

The scientist-speaker can be one of oratory's wayward children. If he is a scientist even when eating breakfast, his speech will have a structure exactly like that of the articles he writes for his professional-society journals. He begins with the detailed history of his topic, then presents the scores of actual or theoretical restrictions which keep him from any statement stronger than "probably," and only in the last part of his talk gets down to solid and contemporary material. The reporter expects that almost all his quotes will be taken from the final fifteen minutes of



the speech, but he must understand the earlier parts of the speech or he will not hear it in the speaker's perspective.

The esoteric subject discussed before a specialist audience can threaten the reporter with journalistic indigestion. Unmerciful fate, why did the city editor want a story about Metallurgist Mitchell's talk before the Engineering Society on "Revised Formulae for Verifying the Molecular Organization of Ferric Oxides"? Perhaps he thought the reporter too cocky and wished to pull him down a peg; perhaps he had been tipped that "This will be a good speech." Whatever the reason, a downcast reporter sits in the back row and endures seventy minutes of words he never heard before.

Yet he may not be deprived of a story. Let him go honestly to the speaker, confess his plight, and ask what sections of the talk might be of interest to general readers. Metallurgist Mitchell smiles and says, "None, I guess." Then ask him to summarize what he said, and as he does so ask him pleasantly, "How would you say that in nontechnical language?" and "Why are engineers and other technical men interested in that—what's its importance?" After a few minutes of this, the reporter has two or three paragraphs of copy. He may have found out that technological advances which will make automobile springs harder to break are in the offing, or that new and less costly alloys are becoming importantly available. If the speaker is unresponsive, members of his audience may be more coöperative. To leave in a fog of bafflement without trying for a "translation" is poor reporting. To bring back a story may astound the city editor, but never will make him angry or hostile.

#### ANOTHER LANGUAGE

The reporter now is in peril of cracking his professional shin-bone. The scene develops like this:

"Harry," says the city editor soothingly, "trot up to Pulaski Hall tonight. There's going to be a big speech at the Polish National Alliance meeting."

"Not in Polish, I hope?" Harry protests, knowing painfully well what the answer will be.

"I'm afraid so. Professor Kostlicka, of Warsaw, you know."

"Never heard of him," declares Harry defiantly.

"Even so, he's famous. One of the most influential Polish patriots; ranks with Paderewski. No, I don't know what he's going to say. Maybe he'll have an English translation with him. He gets in on the 7:16, talks at 8, and they hustle him back to the station in a taxi to catch the 9:58 sleeper. You won't have much chance to talk with him, and if you did the welcoming committee would be swarming all about. Sorry, Harry, but you're elected."

Harry can win the election, however. Indeed, Professor Kostlicka may have an English translation of his speech. On the chance that he hasn't, the reporter reaches the hall a little early, to spot someone who can help him. To an executive of the Polish National Alliance he confesses his ignorance of Polish and asks what he can do. The officer may delegate someone to sit with the reporter and translate. If this help is not available, the reporter looks for a wide-awake and friendly member of the audience, to whom he tells his difficulty. Being asked to help the paper is a bait that few individuals can resist; almost everyone has pictured himself a reporter, and here is the chance to be one, however briefly and unofficially. "I'll help you." The liaison man may even sit off to one side with the reporter, so that they can talk more freely. For the next ten days, he will tell his friends, "That piece in the paper about Professor Kostlicka was really my story; I told the reporter what to say."

A speech handled in this second-hand fashion had better be put largely in paraphrase rather than in direct quotation. Usually there are three or four ways in which a statement can be translated, each with a different shade of meaning, and the translator will give a version with the tone he himself favored rather than the slightly yet perhaps importantly different one the speaker had in mind.

If he arrived too late to catch an assistant, the reporter at least can take notes on the times the audience reacted most vigorously and after the speech can ask an obviously intelligent listener to summarize those high spots. Not knowing the language doesn't mean not getting the story. Covering a speech often calls for as much true resourcefulness as does dredging a city hall scoop story when the officials don't want to talk.

Whenever he can, which means almost always, the reporter interviews the speaker immediately after the talk and verifies the quotations and paraphrases he intends to use. This is the reporter's chief protection if the story should bring a complaint of misquotation. The city editor will agree that his reporter went the limit in ensuring accuracy.

Many speakers, particularly the professionals, come equipped with carbon copies of their talks, prepared especially for reporters, and will be actively disappointed if they aren't asked for these carbons. Others prepare abstracts, and herein lies a danger. A reporter fortified with an abstract may listen haphazardly. The speaker voices vigorous statements, confident that he said them so that they would not stir controversy and recrimination. He feared, though, that if printed these statements would have a different effect, that they would be more inflammatory when read than when heard. Accordingly, he toned down the abstract, and the reporter who thinks about what he will do on his forthcoming two days off instead of listening to the speech has a much diluted story. Other times, the speaker's notion of news values may be rickety, however honest. An abstract can be an assistance, but it is no substitute for listening.

Often a speaker sends an advance copy of his talk to the newspaper office, and the reporter may believe that having this copy excuses him from going to the lecture. Emphatically it doesn't. The speaker might miss a train connection and not reach the city in time, and the paper would quote him as saying things that the 250 members of the reluctantly dispersed audience know he wasn't on hand to say.

Other times the speaker may omit strong passages that were in the manuscript, or may become enthusiastic because of the audience's vigorous responses and may make his points much more vividly than they appeared in the advance copy. Again, the speaker may present an entirely different talk.

Monday he talked to the Kiwanians at Junctionville; Tuesday he is to face the Kiwanians at Middletown. He has a repertoire of five speeches and plans to use "No. 3" on both audiences. After the Junctionville speech, one of the audience tells him, "I'm from Middletown. You talk to our club tomorrow. A bunch of

us came down for this meeting—Junctionville club's anniversary, you know."

"Umph," the speaker reflects. "Twenty out of the forty who will hear me tomorrow listened to me today also. I can't use 'No. 3' talk for both clubs. Well, I'll give the Middletowners 'No. 4' and the delegation that came down here today won't listen twice to the same speech."

Only once in a century will a speaker remember to call the Middletown newspaper office and warn that the speech he will deliver is not the one for which he sent the advance copy. It's up to the reporter to discover that.

When an advance copy actually is a faithful account of what a speaker said, the reporter can convert that advance copy into a story in less than half an hour. He begins by skimming the manuscript and checking in the margin passages that seem especially printable. Next he cuts out the passages he has checked and pastes them in the desired sequence. If some are too long, he rewrites them from direct quotation into briefer paraphrase. Finally, he writes a lead. Simple, and workmanlike.

Recapitulating, taking serviceable notes involves:

1. Putting the notes into full sentences rather than nounless or verbless half-phrases.
2. Creating an interest in the speech, as an aid to unflagging and accurate listening.
3. Becoming familiar with the speaker's oratorical trademarks.
4. Verifying quotations.

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## 9

# WRITING SPEECH STORIES

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### ANOTHER CHANCE TO EXCEL

COVERING A SPEECH offers a reporter one chance to show his caliber; writing the story presents another. Broad gauge or narrow gauge, he now manifests what he can do with an inherently difficult piece of copy. Writing speech stories is difficult? How so, when they are so largely direct quotation?

The difficulties are two: 1. That of condensing; 2. That of obtaining individuality. Look first at the task of condensing. The speaker talked for 5,400 words, which the reporter must compress into, let us say, 450. These 450 must be selected so exactly that they make upon readers the same impact as did the 5,400 upon listeners. To present the speech in 450 words, any 450, is cloyingly simple, but to have them make the "same impact" calls for genuine skill.

Moreover, the reporter is balancing between two desires. One is to be fair and accurate to the speaker, the other is to be interesting. There are so many speeches these days that the reader market for them seems supersaturated. Actually it isn't, but the reporter fears it will be any moment. The strongest speeches ordinarily are those about controversial subjects, and here speakers protect themselves by inserting little reservations, "probably," "possibly," and all their cousins and nephews. Omit these restrictions, and the speech story will be of dynamite; include them, and it is soda water. Mournfully, the reporter includes them; integrity compels him to do so.

At once the second difficulty crowds in upon him. The story must reflect one particular speech; it must not be too much a

brother to all the other speech stories the paper has carried in the last month. Yet speeches themselves often are highly alike in structure, and in content many are no higher than "fairly good." Their quality draws from the way in which they are given, the voice inflections, the pronunciations, the gestures, the general showmanship of the speaker. These personal qualities all will be lost when the speech is embalmed in type. The reporter is beaten?

### CHOOSING THE LEAD

He isn't. The facility of language which allowed the speaker to exhibit his showmanship permits the reporter in turn to manifest his. He will do it chiefly in the lead. Here is where speech stories face the danger of becoming monotonously alike. The first speech story he wrote earned from the city editor a laconic but friendly, "Not so bad, kid," and the reporter jumped to the judgment that he had discovered "the way" to write a speech. All he had discovered was one way; if he employs that way incessantly, his writings will be suffocatingly parallel. Few readers will follow them far enough to get beyond the lead, where they are reading the reporter's contributions, and into the body of the story, where they are reading the speaker's contributions, modified by the reporter only to the extent that compression was necessary. The reporter will use rhetoric's full flexibility in order to keep all his speech stories from starting alike. He has five categories of leads, enough to prevent today's speech account from opening as did yesterday's. They are:

1. The direct-quotation lead, which splits into three subdivisions:

- A. The single sentence of quotation. This form is eminently useful when one statement or idea outweighs in interest, importance, or both, all else in the speech.

"Aviation is the safest form of travel, safer even than the railroad train," George Barnes, chief pilot for Transamerica Airlines, asserted yesterday at. . . .

The chief limitation upon this form is that the sentence to be quoted should be reasonably short. If it is retarded by three or

four subordinate clauses or by long qualifications, it is too much for eyes and brain to encompass at a glance. Such a quotation as this would be most questionable:

"Aviation is the fastest growing form of travel in the United States as in other parts of the world and, although it is the youngest, it has already become the safest, and, with the technical and technological improvements constantly being made as a result of costly and untiring research, will become constantly safer, less expensive, and more popular," George Barnes, chief pilot for Transamerica Airlines, asserted yesterday at. . . .

This is a single sentence of quotation, but it is a sentence again described unflatteringly as a "hell diver." Employed as in this example, this lead is an extraordinarily effective method of keeping readers from continuing with the story.

*B.* The entire paragraph of quotation. This procedure, useful also in bringing the hell diver back to the surface, is called for when the one most compelling idea is too intricate to be shrunk into a single sentence:

"Aviation is the safest form of travel, safer even than the railroad train. This safety is due to the expensive and unflagging research work which tests a new idea thoroughly and exhaustively before it is adopted. Rigid standards and qualifications for both operating and maintenance crews keep the safety level high."

These were statements made by George Barnes, chief pilot for Transamerica Airlines at. . . .

Some papers demand that the speaker's name be wormed into the first paragraph, in this fashion: ". . . ," said George Barnes, ". . . ." The theory is that the story is more clear-cut and that there is less chance of a reader becoming confused in finding out who made the statements. When this variation is employed, the "who is he?" or news identification is divided, with the first paragraph offering only the essentials and the rest being deferred to the next paragraph:

"Aviation is the safest form of travel, safer even than the railroad train," Pilot George Barnes told the Lions Club meeting at the Hotel Warren yesterday noon. "This safety is due to the expensive and unflagging research work which tests a new idea thoroughly and exhaustively before it is adopted. Rigid standards

and qualifications for both operating and maintenance crews keep the safety level high."

Mr. Barnes is chief pilot for Transamerica Airlines. He has been 11 years in commercial aviation.

"Flying is safer every month, because. . . ."

Some reporters avoid the full paragraph of quotation for a lead, as being "too heavy." They contend that a reader's interest is stirred by a shorter quotation, a single sentence, and that the immediate filling in of the five *W*'s, especially the "who," gives a strong stage setting that permits an instant decision whether the story is appealing enough to follow further. They argue that a whole paragraph of quotation surfeits rather than stimulates; that a reader wishes a dab rather than a bite in deciding whether to pursue the story. The argument has some power, for an entire paragraph of quotation is deadening unless the quotes genuinely are lively, but the counterargument remains that many a speech requires the full-paragraph lead in the cause of accuracy, always superior to that of interestingness. Though it should not be used too often, this form is so serviceable that a reporter should not be circumambient in shunning it.

C. The catchword or slogan lead. When an entire speech is developed from the frequent repetition of one vivid, provocative idea or concept, this lead is splendid:

"Go by plane and live longer."

This was the advice of George Barnes, chief pilot for Transamerica Airlines, in his address before the Lions Club meeting at Hotel Warren yesterday noon.

Almost always the slogan lead is short and crackling. It must be, for it attempts with a single staccato blow to so impress a reader, usually by surprising, provoking, or shocking him, that he remains with a story despite his intention only to glance at it. This lead risks the entire story on the pulling power of the slogan, and the advertising world testifies loud-voicedly that most successful slogans are short. The slogan is staccato, jerky, impressionistic, succeeding by what it implies or suggests at least as much as by what it declares outright. "Go by plane, and live longer" says nothing about aviation having outgrown a somewhat truant adolescence, about the clouds being safer than the highway



or even the rails, about such immense technological advances that the wrecks of a year ago simply couldn't happen today, about the old idea that planes were dangerous being now out of date and those who cling to it being mossbacks, but it suggests all these items and they quite as much as its own positive assertion stir interest.

The slogan lead cannot be used once a week, because many speeches have no often repeated catch-phrase, but when it can be employed it is powerful.

2. The name lead. Use this one when "what was said" is not the best part of the story. This lead takes three forms:

A. The speaker's name, excellent for a routine speech by a person so generally known that his name, without other identification, is impressive: "State Treasurer Herbert C. Gale spoke today at. . . ."

This form should not be used if the speaker said anything powerful; it is good for the somewhat casual talk by a person well known. Had the treasurer said that the state's financial condition is better now than at any time within sixty years, the "what was said" would have been dominant. If, however, he merely talked informally about his fishing trip last summer, the name lead is appropriate.

How prominent a person must be to entitle his speech to a name lead is debatable. Is the man who was governor six years ago still "well known"? How recently can a person have come into news prominence before he is ripe for this lead? The reporter uses his judgment; there is no categorical answer. He marks this somewhat lame lead as one to be used sparingly. This form of lead is deadly if the advance story, printed a day or so earlier, also had a name lead. Some readers will remember the advance, and the later relation, opening with the same wording, will seem so familiar and listless that they stop reading at once.

B. Subject of the speech. This method is good when the subject is unusual, about something currently high in public interest, or automatically provocative:

His experiences fighting with the Canadians in the Second World War were the subject of a talk given by William A. Griffin at the Technical Club's meeting last night at Hotel Warren.

This lead's chief utility is as a relief from overfrequent use of the other forms. Reserved for minor addresses, it justifies its existence, but it is too weak for an address in which "what was said" would make strong copy.

C. The title of the speech, a variation of the preceding form:

"Eleven Months of Death" was the subject William A. Griffin, who fought with the Canadians in the Second World War, discussed at the Technical Club's meeting. . . .

This form is usable when the speech has a catchy, stimulating title. Like the other forms of name lead, it is good for relief purposes, for yawny talks by persons well known, or for mediocre addresses by persons little known.

3. Conditions under which the address was given. When it can be used, this is one of the best forms of all:

Speaking in College Hall, where 24 years ago he marched to the stage and received the degree of bachelor of arts, Dr. George H. Peters yesterday assumed the presidency of Atherton College and pledged himself to "a continuation of the purposes and ideals which were this college's in the years when I was an undergraduate."

This form must be used sparingly, because the linking of conditions and of speech must be completely natural. If the linking is artificial or forced, it fails, as does this example:

Outdoors, a biting wind howled through the streets. Indoors, in Masonic Temple, radiator valves gurgled warmly and an audience of 150 persons listened last night to Carl W. Vore, professor of history at Atherton College, discuss "Recent Changes in American Foreign Policy."

This strained lead tried to build interest out of the fact that it is warmer in winter indoors than outdoors. What was winding through the reporter's mind as he devised this errant lead? Thoughts about like these: "This speech is heavy stuff, and every point he made dovetailed into two or three other points. Nothing, not one thing, that I can set off by itself. Very heavy stuff, too. I'll have to look somewhere else for a lively lead. Everybody's interested in the weather, so I'll use it for a lead. A

little bit forced, but. . . ." Very much forced. The conditions lead is highly effective when employed properly, and this means about once or twice a year. Don't ruin it by abusing it.

# OLD FAITHFUL

4. The modified-quotation or paraphrase lead, the old reliable. When all else fails, use this form; however drab otherwise, it has the power that comes from giving much information in small space. It may or may not glisten, but always it proclaims "Plenty of substance in this story." It runs like this:

*That* the fire department is undermanned, *that* the alarm system is obsolete, and *that* the department needs two new trucks, were statements made by Fire Chief Richard A. White at. . . .

This lead is a time-tested means of handling a speech in which the speaker's ideas are at least as good as his phrasings. His words, reflected in type, would be dim because of the loss of gesture and voice inflection; they would have nothing to compensate for their shaky rhetoric. Presented in paraphrase, they regain something of the assistance given them originally by gesture and inflection.

The paraphrase may be of a single statement, and thus similar to form A of the direct-quotation method, or may be a bulletining of the principal topics in the speech, as in the example. This summarizing method handles nicely the address in which two or three statements are of nearly equal value. Don't stretch it beyond three "that" clauses, lest it become soggy, and above all avoid an interior "that":

That the gasoline tax is too high, that the state highway program *that* the last legislature sidetracked deserved to be killed, that highway maintenance should cost less now *that* prices are down, and that no more trunk-line roads need be built for at least ten years, were statements made by. . . .

This lead is as foggy as the coast of Maine, because "that" recurs too often. Each "that" should be the introduction to a summarizing clause, but there are too many such clauses and "that" is used twice for other purposes. What chance has a reader quickly to become acquainted with the grammatical struc-

ture and to use this acquaintance as an aid to absorbing rapidly a weight of information? He has not the slightest chance. Yet for all that it can be abused, the "three that" form is of eminent utility.

The "two that" structure is a useful modification, available for a speech with a pair of outstanding declarations:

That the Utopia Today pension planners will elect the next governor and that the old-line political parties are dead were statements made by. . . .

In the speech with one transcending idea, no "that" is necessary, though one sometimes may be used for smoother sentence structure:

The Utopia Today pension planners will elect the next governor, State Senator Richard A. Green said at. . . .

That the Utopia Today pension planners will elect the new governor was the prophecy made yesterday by. . . .

5. The participial or tie-in lead. This form hooks the speech immediately into the background from which it grows:

Contradicting assertions of the Taxpayers' League that he voted for "extravagant" measures, State Senator Harry J. Allen in an address last night before the Wahconah Park Civic Club defended his action in supporting the old-age pension bill offered by the Utopia Today forces.

This form is not used often enough. Many speeches are outgrowths and throw back directly to earlier news. This form combines "today" and "background" effectively. Its only danger is that one or two present participles may get lost:

Contradicting assertions of the Taxpayers' League that he voted for "extravagant" measures, aiming to pay political debts rather than attaining economy, State Senator Harry J. Allen in an address last night. . . .

The second and third participles, "aiming" and "attaining," do the damage. In syntax, they should be parallel to "contradicting" and should be further characterizing of the senator's efforts. But they aren't; instead they introduce not what the senator said

but what his critics said. Here are three nearby participles, one facing north and two facing south. The reader will be justified if he says, "I don't quite get what this is driving at," and turns to the comics page.

### FOLLOW UP THE LEAD

Structure after the lead is much simpler than some reporters allow it to be. A common failing is to omit any elaboration of the material used in the lead:

The Quakers were the most pugnacious sect in American history, Rev. Roswell Rhiner said in his sermon yesterday morning at St. George's Church.

Many readers will continue with the story, to learn wherein the Quakers, traditionally so pacific, actually were so belligerent. The story continues by giving the history of the Quakers but says nothing more of their embattledness. Their question, "How come the Quakers were such a bunch of fighters?" unanswered, readers will have a fermenting irritation. The story was sold to them under false pretenses; they were given a good sample, but when they bought, the plate was brought to them empty. Younger writers seem to believe that a topic mentioned in the lead must not be mentioned again, that a second mention is repetitious.

Not so. If the lead topic was so good, it is almost unthinkable that the speaker gave it only one or two sentences. He expanded it, dwelt upon it, hammered it into his listeners. The reporter must do likewise. The lead left flapping in the wind is a sign of the novice.

In the few cases where the lead topic actually received but forty or fifty words from the speaker, that fact should be mentioned prominently in order to keep the fragment in context. Congressman Harmon rambles on about "keeping the party's campaign pledges." Ancient stuff; he's said it a score of times before. Then he announces, "This is the most efficient of the six Congresses I've been in. We've passed more important bills per week than any Congress since the 1917 session." Then he goes back to the party pledges. His momentary defense of this

Congress is the high spot of the story, yet he made it only as an aside or an interjection. Present it so:

"This is the most efficient of the six Congresses I've been in," Representative Harry W. Harmon of the 4th district told the Civics Club last night at its meeting at Masonic Temple. He made this statement as an interlude in his discussion of the way the Republicrats have treated their campaign pledges.

Mr. Harmon elaborated his defense of this Congress only by the explanation that, "We've passed more important bills per week than any Congress since the 1917 or World War Congress." The rest of his address dealt with the pledges.

Naïve? Perhaps, but complete and in focus. This one good remark has not been ripped out of context and presented in isolation; it has been relayed to the readers exactly as the Congressman gave it, as a digression. To report it as such is the only practice obeisant to accuracy.

Where a single statement has been used for the lead, the speaker's other major declarations must be buttressed to give the story a structure and keep it from being discursive. A good structure is:

First block, usually one paragraph, devoted wholly to the lead angle.

Second block, probably a single paragraph, given to a summary of the other important statements.

Third block, often one paragraph, the catch-all.

Fourth block, as many paragraphs as needed, used to elaborate the lead material presented in the first block.

Fifth block, as many paragraphs as required, given to expanding the topics listed in the second block, in the order of mention there.

When the lead introduces more than one statement, the catch-all becomes the second block. The third block expands the several items in the lead, in the sequence in which they were given there.

A very long speech, running more than a column, may have an "Associated Press structure," following the system used by that wire service in its longer Congressional accounts:

First block, lead topic.

Second block, summary of next best statements.

Third block, catch-all.

Fourth block, two- or three-paragraph abstract of the lead topic.

Fifth block, several-paragraph abstracting of the topics listed in the second block, in the order of appearance there.

Sixth block, further expansion of the lead topic.

Seventh block, further expansion of the second block.

This structure was devised by the wire to make it easy for a telegraph editor to do his work with a pair of shears. If he wanted only 600 words of Congress, he snipped off the story at the end of the fifth block; if he could use 1,000, he let it run through the sixth block, and if the paper was enough open for all 1,800 words, he took the whole chronicle. It is a serviceable structure of limited necessity; reserve it for the mile-long stories. It has no place in a 500-word writing.

### THE REPORTER'S INFLUENCE

Notice now the three increasing degrees to which the reporter influences the speech: Direct quotation, indirect quotation, and paraphrase.

Direct quotation is the presenting of the speaker's subject in his own words, yet the reporter nonetheless is a factor. Rarely are all the speaker's words given, because few addresses are so significant that they must be printed in full. In plucking out the 300 or 400 words to be directly quoted, the reporter, if he is careless, can distort as much as if he rewrote the speech. Consider these examples, the first being a full text and the second an abbreviated quoting:

"I have no interest in supporting Mr. Foster's candidacy for mayor. Mr. Foster has deserted the party several times, and each time has been allowed to come back, and each time he has been forgiven. Now, when he wants the highest office the city can confer on him, he again asks the party to support him.

"However, Mr. Foster has several times given the party at least as much as he has received from it. Only last month it was his influence which avoided a very serious disagreement among the members of the city committee, a disagreement that might well have wrecked the party in preparing for the forthcoming election.

"Because of these several cases, I am not going to hold out against Mr. Foster. If the rest of the city committee is willing to support Mr. Foster, I am willing to keep silent and not object. As a loyal party member, I should even work in Mr. Foster's behalf."

"I have no interest in supporting Mr. Foster's candidacy for mayor. Mr. Foster has deserted the party several times. Now, when he wants the highest office the city can confer on him, he again asks the party to support him.

"If the rest of the city committee is willing to support Mr. Foster, I am willing to keep silent and not object."

Word for word, the second instance is completely faithful, yet it has an altogether different impact. It suggests that Mr. Foster's conduct is midnight black, without extenuations, and that the speaker will keep silent but will in no wise help Mr. Foster. The full text disagrees emphatically with such a view.

The reporter, then, must be forever alert that his direct quotations are so well chosen that, despite their condensings, they remain in focus and in context. A snatch here and a snatch there will not be accurate.

The second degree of reportorial influence is in indirect quoting, in which the speaker's ideas are presented mainly but not entirely in his own words. He said:

The city tax rate never has been low, yet only this year has it gone skyrocketing to a height which threatens hundreds of home owners with such a tax burden that they are in dire peril of losing their homes.

The reporter wrote:

Although the tax rate always has been high, only this year has it skyrocketed to the point where many home owners are in danger of losing their homes, Mr. Mead declared.

Though the speaker's words have been altered, their impact remains unchanged.

Indirect quotation has three advantages: (1) It permits a modest condensing; (2) It allows the reporter to untangle the speaker's intricate and baffling sentences and to smooth out his grammar; (3) It cares for a part of the speech that the reporter



failed to gather precisely enough to permit direct quotation. As in the case of direct quotations, the in-context consideration always must be kept strongly in mind.

Finally, the paraphrase, in which the reporter uses his own words rather than the speaker's. First, the speech extract itself; second, the paraphrase:

"And so I told this bird, 'You won't get away with anything like that. I won't let you, and I'm the guy who can keep you from it.' When I said that, he shut up and there wasn't another word out of him on the thing, not one."

Mr. Mead said that he warned Mr. Mathews to drop the matter, and it was dropped.

This procedure allows a more thorough abbreviating. It is useful also in repairing the speaker's broken-ribbed diction. Still more is it useful in letting clarity into an utterance; the speaker wallows in an idea, explains it clumsily, largely by gesture, inflection, and facial expression. Denied these aids, the reporter translates from speaker's words to his own, and obtains coherence:

"The city still has to find a way, that's a hard thing to do, to get back the \$18,000 we're going to lose because the legislature took away that outside-tuition state refund based on what it costs us after you take out what they pay us and the state makes up the rest, in semiannual payments, so that we get what it costs although the state pays part of it instead of our getting it all from the town where the pupil comes from."

Mayor Harper said the city still has to find a way to make up the \$18,000 payment from the state that was lost when the tuition refund was abolished by the legislature. Under the old system the state paid the difference between the cost to this city of caring for a pupil from an outside town and what the town itself contributed.

Some reporters hesitate to paraphrase; they prefer to omit entirely if direct quotation seems unworkable. They believe that no one else can say it as well as did the speaker. Remember that gesture, facial gymnastics, and inflections frequently do work which words alone cannot do. The reporter cannot reproduce these assistances. When he paraphrases, he is selecting words which have the same net effect upon readers as did the speaker's

original words, gestures, facials, and inflections. He is rephrasing to obtain accuracy. Perhaps it is paradoxical, but it is true.

### WHAT IS A DIRECT QUOTATION?

How "correct" must a quotation be before it can be surrounded by quotation marks? Ordinarily, direct quotation does not demand the literal reproduction of the speaker's words. They may be quoted directly if they convey:

1. The substance of the remark, in full accuracy.
2. The spirit in which the remark was made.
3. The typical language used by the speaker.

Said the speaker:

I don't want you to get the idea that I'm all excited about this proposal. I don't get all excited that easy. I think it's a good idea, but it isn't the best idea we ever heard of.

Wrote the reporter:

I don't want you to think that I'm all excited about this proposal. I don't get all excited that easily. I think it is a good idea, but it is not the best idea we ever heard.

In no way does the reporter's version leave a different impression than did the lecturer's. It would be glorious if every word could be reproduced exactly, but sometimes that is impossible. Speakers may clack their tongues at 225 words a minute during parts of their addresses, and may do it in halls where sound rebounds like billiard balls and the words of half a second ago bump into the just-voiced phrases, and may do it while an applauding audience is in a machine-gun roar of handclapping.

Direct quotation is the safest method of handling controversial material. Paraphrased, however adroitly, such matter may be or seem to be inaccurate because the rewording makes a slightly different impact than did the original phrasing. Offered in direct quotation, this debatable material is its own evidence of careful, faithful, objective reporting; it is given quite as the speaker said it, with no improvements, embellishings, deletions, or softenings. Here is what a perhaps overenthusiastic speaker said:

Christianity is a good religion. It is one of the best religions. However, it does not equal and never can equal the advancement and civilization of such a religion as Confucianism.

To many readers, this would be active heresy. They may believe that no one "in his right mind" would, or could, make such declarations. Seeing a paraphrase version, their reaction is "I don't believe he said that. The reporter must have got it wrong." Seeing direct quotation, their response is, "Well, I never thought that man would ever say things like that, but there they are, right in his own words." If statements are likely to arouse attack and rebuttal, present them so that the speaker rather than the newspaper must take the backfire.

### GIVE HIM A BREAK

The general practice is for the reporter to remedy the speaker's bad grammar. The spoken sentence isn't twin to the sentence that is read; sometimes they're not in the same family. A speaker, even a precise and highly formal man, is "conversing" with his audience. He talks and the audience replies by nodding or shaking heads, paying attention or gazing at the ceiling, applauding or remaining unmoved. Something of the freedom of colloquialism sneaks into the address. The speaker uses a singular subject with a plural verb:

The number of instances of this sort of misconduct have increased alarmingly.

No one minds that his grammar slipped; the speaker's platform personality keeps these minor miswordings from grating or even being noticed. Congealed into type, with the platform personality removed, the sentence makes a much different impact. The "conversing" quality has dwindled, the formalism has increased, and any departure from rhetorical precision is strongly evident.

Rarely does a speaker talk for forty-five or sixty minutes without tangling an occasional subject and verb, mislaying a pronoun, hanging a participle, or even splitting an infinitive. The only exception is the fellow who reads directly and continuously from a manuscript, and his talk is likely to be so flat that the reporter gives it three paragraphs and thinks them too generous. That there will be little slips, many of them, can be taken for granted. Keep the word that is heard and the word that is read on a parity by patching the grammar.

The reporter uses his head in doing this; he doesn't give a prize fighter, telling how he won the championship, a diction like that of the Rev. Dr. Thrush of the Sixth Church. He amends the grammar within the limits allowed by the dictum of offering "the substance and spirit of a speech, in typical language."

Even the highest public officials and the most erudite professors wander away from the grammatical reservation. To quote them too faithfully is an active injustice. Now and then a mayor or a governor macerates the language; quote him word for word, all the time, and the difference between the spoken sentence and the sentence that is read will make him so ridiculous that he seems a freak and a boor. Yet when he was speaking, the audience regarded him not as illiterate but as an earnest though none too polished orator.

Speech reporting has several warnings. The first is to shun the ham-sandwich lead in which the speaker is topped and bot-tomed by a slice of quotation:

"God," said Prof. John T. Jensen, "and Mammon have some-times combined to build up the British empire." He was speaking before 300 persons in. . .

The way the reader mentally inflects this sentence may be lugubriously different from the way Professor Jensen inflected it. When both the speaker's name and his identification are used as the cheese in the sandwich, the result is even worse:

"God and Mammon have sometimes," said Prof. John T. Jensen, head of the Atherton College history department, speaking before 300 persons in Masonic Hall last night on "British Foreign Pol-icy," the third in the Civic Club's winter lecture series, "combined to build up the British empire."

By the time the reader has eaten all the five-*W* cheese in the middle, he has forgotten the start of the quotation and must read the sentence a second time. He won't.

Yet the news identification of the speaker must go into the lead, for this identification frequently is the chief reason the talk was authoritative enough to be worth a story.

"Japanese finances are near the breaking point," said Jerome T. Hill in addressing the Solus Club last night at Atwood Hall.

Why should anyone care what Jerome Hill thinks about Japanese finances, for who is he to be heard respectfully?

"Japanese finances are near the breaking point," Jerome T. Hill, who returned three weeks ago from Tokio where for three years he was Oriental sales manager for an American electrical company, said last night in. . . .

The reporter need not follow the speaker's chronology. The point the speaker made at the end, where it received greatest emphasis, will not be the dominant point if given at the end of the written version.

As a general rule, omit transition or connecting sentences, such as "Then turning to. . . ." The speaker uses these for two reasons: first, to indicate a new topic, and, second, to give him a split-second in which to think out the phrasing of his next sentence. The reporter introduces a new topic by paragraphing, ample evidence that a new facet is upcoming. Remarks such as "I think" and "I believe" are to be edited out unless they are essential qualifications. The speaker uses them to pause for breath without seeming to do so or to allow him to plan his next sentence.

The language has more than 350 ways of expressing "he said." The reporter should know forty or fifty of these variants, but he should watch their color. "He insisted" and "he remarked" both include "he said" but they are of far different meaning. Beware particularly of "he pointed out," for this suggests inevitably that "he pointed out beyond contradiction." However neutrally intended, it is taking sides; the reporter underwrites the validity of the speaker's argument. This phrasing should be pruned carefully from stories dealing with inflammably controversial topics. Distinguish also between the objective "he contradicted" and the partisan "he refuted."

When a speech is offered mainly in paraphrase, each paragraph should contain an accrediting so that readers will be reminded that the speaker rather than the newspaper made the statements. To emphasize that the newspaper is reflecting what someone else declared rather than giving its own views, "he said" should be inserted into the top rather than the bottom sentence of the paragraph.

A mere list of the speaker's topics is useless; tell, however briefly, what he said about them. Compare these:

Mr. Hudson commented on the need for better supervision of traffic on Central Avenue.

Mr. Hudson said that traffic on Central Avenue should be supervised night and day by cruiser cars.

The second attempt is only three words longer but it says twice as much.

As he becomes more expert, the reporter dips into experiment. He tries a running story, that is, he writes the story, except for the lead, as the speaker talks. As a later experiment he sits on his notes and attempts to write the story from memory. The first stunt hinges on spotting at its outset whether a remark is worth going into the story or is too weak. The second calls for a photographic memory. These experiments are for the experienced reporter only; don't try them too soon, and in any event have the notes available in case the memory burns out a bearing. After numerous failures, the stunt begins to be workable. The reporter is developing nicely.

The reporter has a final and simple test for the accuracy of the material he has put into his notes. The test works, for all that it builds from the naïve notion that a conscience always is active. If the reporter is perfectly willing to go to the speaker and tell what material he expects to use in the story and how the quotations will read, he has no fear of a distorted or inaccurate story. But if he'd rather not confront the speaker, something is wrong with those notes; they are incomplete or incorrect, or both. The conscience is as good a guide as it was centuries ago when the theologians began arguing about it.

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## 10

### STORIES OF MEETINGS

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#### WHO WANTS A GOOD DINNER?

“YOU’LL GET A GOOD MEAL OUT OF IT.”

“Yes, but you know how dreary these all-day meetings are.”

“I’ll swap assignments with you, Dick. I’d rather spend all day in a warm, dry hotel than chase around in this rain.”

Ever since there have been newspapers, reporters have grumbled at covering meetings, particularly the all-day variety. A single speech isn’t so bad; it’s all done in about an hour, but meetings and conventions go on like the north wind, endlessly. If they were interesting throughout, but they aren’t. . . . Only one speech in three is worth more than two-sentence mention, and the discussions supposed to come in uninterrupted sequence have half-hour pauses. The assignment seems as drab as the day.

Nonetheless, the assignment is a challenge. The reporter is to follow an action with half a dozen or a dozen phases, in itself difficult, and then concentrate the mass into a half-column or three-quarter-column story. Essentially it isn’t a new problem, since much of meeting covering is parallel to handling speeches. Now and then the cake has crinkly frosting, as in the case of a meeting at which three round tables are in course at the same time and in different halls, with the reporter after direct quotations from each. Even this situation generally can be tamed if the reporter uses his knowledge of human nature.

The first work is to find out what will happen, which may be ever so different from the advance announcements. The eminent Chicagoan suddenly cannot come to give his resounding speech

and no one is sure who the substitute will be. "Somebody told me it would be Colonel Hankins." "They're going to drop that speech entirely." "The president of the national association is coming. He's flying, in a special plane."

If he inquires at random, the reporter picks up the traditional nine and ninety versions of what will happen. Even some officials don't know. One official, however, can restore the sun to the heavens; he does know, he has to know, there can't be a meeting unless he does know. He is the man "in charge." He may be the president of the society sponsoring the meeting, though presidents often are shunted to a sidetrack where they can shake hands uninterruptedly. More likely he is the secretary, or a special meeting or convention chairman. Whatever his title, this official has the information.

Almost always he is eager to assist the reporter, for a meeting is judged these days not only by its attendance but by the newspaper space it receives. To have "a good press" is evidence indisputable that the meeting was a success. What the reporter asks, he is likely to be told; he is an important person, even a personage.

The larger meetings have a "press chairman" or "press relations representative," whose duty it is to help the reporter give the meeting "a good press." The reporter uses the services of this genuinely helpful gentleman, but doesn't let him dictate how the story is to be written. That term, "good press," has a specialized meaning: publicity favorable and flattering to the organization. If there are disputes and wrangles, the "press chairman" tells the reporter that they amount to nothing. Actually they may be both interesting and significant. The "press relations" man will try, adroitly or openly, to slant the reporter's story to reflect the viewpoints that the organization indorses. He suggests and hints rather than commands and storms. Despite this attempt to sway the reporter, the official can be truly helpful.

#### VERIFYING THE PROGRAM

The first information the reporter needs is about last-minute changes in program. Are all the scheduled speakers coming? Is the business meeting at 1 o'clock or at 2:30, as some delegates



are saying? Are advance copies of the several addresses available, or when will they be obtainable? To find out, the reporter goes to the press-relations official or, if the meeting hasn't one, to the man in immediate charge of the program. The information obtained, the reporter finds out what the official expects to be the backbone of the meeting, what parts look like the best copy, and why. This is a tentative judging.

If he cannot attend throughout the day, the reporter verifies with the official that the schedule during the hours he was absent was enacted as planned. This verifying neglected, the afternoon paper proclaims, with eight paragraphs of direct quotation taken from the advance copy, that Major Wildreeve addressed the luncheon gathering. The in-charge man's first words will be, "Say, if you'd asked me about that, I could have told you the major didn't make it. He ran his car into a fire hydrant somewhere up the line."

This official is an extra pair of feet for the reporter; within reason and sometimes far beyond its bounds he will procure information, arrange interviews, dig up background matter, chase speech manuscripts, and "cover in" when the reporter has to be gone for half an hour or so. He will verify names, addresses, and identifications. He will "translate" speeches of such intricate or particularized nature that they baffle the reporter. If Dick covers the meeting without calling on this official for help, Dick is making for himself big chunks of extra and needless work.

Reporter Dick has six chances to ruin his story:

1. He fails to understand the significance of various actions or speeches. Was the election of officers routine or newsworthy? "President, Henry H. Meyers of Wayburn." This may be the first time in the organization's forty-three years that the president has come from any but a "leading city"; the reporter must find out why the entrenched precedent is broken in behalf of Mr. Meyers. To dismiss the election without learning whether it is ordinary or exciting is lazy reporting.

2. He overplays flashy minor incidents at the expense of more important, and equally interesting, happenings. Eben Dean, one of the oldest members and "a little cracked on certain subjects," proposes again the resolution he has offered to the last fifteen an-

nual meetings, that the organization record itself as forever opposed to the replacement of bid whist by bridge. The president keeps a straight face, though many other members don't, and solemnly appoints a "committee on special policies" to which he refers this "most sincere and earnest petition" for study and recommendation. The meeting has a moment's laughter, old Eben blinks in bewilderment, and the reporter uses this freak angle to lead his story, oblivious that the organization, whose normal concern is orthodontia, optometry, or accounting, has roamed far from its orbit by passing, after sizzling debate, a memorial to the Legislature advocating a \$6,000,000 diversion of highway funds in order to hold down other governmental expenses.

3. He writes a dry, boring story. This is particularly probable if he makes no attempt to dig into the background of the meeting. "They came, they jabbered, and then they went home." This state of mind prevents a good story, and almost always a good story is there if the reporter will dredge it out. No meeting drawing 50, 100, or 200 attendants from various parts of the state, the region, or the nation is so lacking in appeals that it cannot yield a dozen good stories.

"Just a bunch of chemists slinging around jawbreaking technical terms." "A hundred lawyers; half of what they said was in Latin and the other half in complex sentences." True enough, but these men of highly specialized interests are talking about topics linked directly to the average man. The chemists have something to say about synthetic gasoline at ten cents a gallon, including taxes; the counselors hope to end the court congestion that forces a man to wait three years before his suit against the autoist who ran him down can be heard.

The reporter's trouble is that he doesn't understand the language of these specialists. Each occupation has its own vocabulary; newspaper folk, for example, can bewilder the outsider as they remark casually about "buns," "precedes," "skinbacks," and "folios." Reporter Dick must expect the chemists and the lawyers to talk in their own jargons. That they do so is no handicap to producing news. Dick will not see the news until he learns some of the lingo, or, because of the pressure of time, gets someone to translate it for him.

4. He writes a story biased or partisan. The state optometry society chaps gave him two splendid meals and treated him like a prince. Dick forgets that they squabbled so hotly that one group almost seceded and set up a rival organization. He dwells in his story on the society's "tradition of progress," to which the president gave most of his banquet speech. Other times, the reporter shows disapproval of the organization because the editorial page dislikes its aims. The pension planners aren't to be ridiculed on the news page because the editorial columns find fault with their economics.

5. He grinds out a story that is for "club members" or insiders rather than for general readers. The general readers come first; if the story has no appeal in its top paragraphs, they drop it. The members attending the meeting will read the story, regardless of its structure, either to learn what they missed that the reporter spotted or to see how good a press their organization received.

6. He produces a story so imperfect structurally that it must be read in its entirety before it discloses the main currents of action and of speech. This muddy story probably is chronological, but whatever the cause of its defects, a more adequate planning will erase the flaws.

#### TYPES OF READERS

The reader audience can be divided into three main groups:

1. Casual readers, *disinterested* but not of necessity *uninterested*. Not members of or connected with the organization, they are likely to be interested largely by some surprising or provocative remark or action.

A subdivision includes those who were aware of the meeting but decided in advance that they cared nothing about it. "Humph, the doctors have their state meeting here next week. So what?" Such a reader is hard to interest because of his previous determination not to be captured. Here again the surprising or provocative remark or action stands the best chance of engaging attention.

A second subdivision embraces readers with a mild curiosity about the meeting. They are willing to read briefly, "to see

what the doctors are up to now," but a well-arranged story can lure them into following somewhat at length.

2. "Club members" whether or not they attended the meeting. They will read in detail, no matter what the story's internal organization, for "our society" is being discussed.

3. Nonmembers with latent but genuine curiosity about the meeting. This group is surprisingly large. The extent of public interest in affairs beyond its own back yard has increased with the quantity of printed and of radio information, but some reporters haven't discovered the fact. They still regard a specialized activity as interesting only to the members of its craft.

In devising a story for all three groups, the practice is to satisfy the nonmembers first. The story opens with a strong lead, followed by a rapid summary. This will be enough for the casual reader who remains casual. For the members and for the casuals who have been intrigued by the first quarter-column, the story then offers detailed accounts of the principal speeches and actions.

Beware, however, against leading with a supposedly sprightly angle that attracts nonmembers by suggesting that the organization is a freak. All the members will be angered and the paper will make some long-memored enemies:

Some 80 members of the Tricounty Medical Society held their spring meeting yesterday at Hotel Warren and listened to some of the most incomprehensible addresses that ever reverberated off the ceiling of the hotel's Crystal Room. Hardly a word had less than four or five syllables, and even if the medicos didn't understand what it was all about they looked as if they knew.

When it was all over, they had found out about the latest kinks in putting patients to sleep, jerking appendixes, and why you can't do anything about hay fever.

The doctors won't be the only ones resenting the paper's flippancy.

The procedure of covering a meeting has two parts. The first is getting the help of the meeting chairman or of the publicity man, who supplies a revised and corrected program, advance copies of speeches and of resolutions to come before the business meeting, and the slates of officers to be voted upon. This is the background or preparatory work. The second part is covering the sessions. The device here is to take the notes for each speech or

each phase of the business meeting upon a separate piece of paper. The sheets then can be shuffled to bring the best material to the top of the pile.

### STORY STRUCTURE

The lead plays a point to attract the casual readers and presents the five *W*'s. The lead may be a quotation from a speech, the name of a local resident elected to an office, the announcement where the next meeting will be held, the gist of a resolution acted upon, or some other item of potential general interest.

Then come two summary paragraphs, their sequence depending upon which is the more interesting. One paragraph lists all the speakers and tells who they are and what their topics were. The other outlines the business meeting, elections, resolutions approved or rejected, and other formal actions taken.

These paragraphs are followed by the catch-all, which tells who directed the meeting, who assisted, and who the entertainers were.

At this point the story is complete for the casual reader, who now has its essence. For the "devoted" reader, it goes on with elaborations. First the lead matter is detailed and then the items in the two summary paragraphs are expanded, in the order of their listing in those paragraphs. The structure looks like this:

Block 1: Lead, one or more paragraphs.

Block 2: Summary paragraph of speeches, or of business meeting.

Block 3: Summary paragraph of business meeting, or of speeches.

Block 4: Catch-all.

Block 5: Expansion of the lead matter.

Block 6: Expansion of block 2.

Block 7: Expansion of block 3.

Block 8: Texts of resolutions mentioned more briefly above.

This structure is highly parallel to that of the speech story. Its strength is that it provides a story that is clear, because the structure is so apparent. Because blocks 2 and 3 are interchangeable in sequence, and thereby blocks 6 and 7 are reversible, the structure keeps meeting stories from being too parallel. In some, the speeches are more interesting than the business session

and are described first, and in others the calories will come from the business rather than the quotations.

The story built upon this plan will be at least 500 words long. A shorter story must concentrate on a few peaks and pinnacles. It can offer only the most select of details. Devoting most of its space to one speech or to one business session, it takes one of two forms:

- First:      Block 1:    Lead, written for the casual reader.  
              Block 2:    Summary of the rest of the meeting.  
              Block 3:    Details of the lead material.
- Second:    Block 1:    Lead, written for the casual reader.  
              Block 2:    Elaboration of the lead.  
              Block 3:    Summary of the rest of the meeting.

The first form is preferable, in that it better highlights the whole meeting in the top of the story.

When the longer story is employed, the speeches presented in block 6 or block 7 begin in each case with the speaker's name, as "Mr. Finch said in part" or "Dr. Bender said in part." This is done for clarity, to emphasize that a new speech has begun. The specimens that follow show, on the left, how easily a rapid reader can miss the start of a new address and believe that he is still with the "old" speech until context tells him something is wrong, and, on the right, how a paragraph beginning with a name rather than with a quotation mark prevents this confusion:

"If this proposal becomes law, the quality of the men entering our profession will be maintained at the high standard we have guarded so zealously throughout the years."

"When this society decided to have an historian, some 20 years ago," Mr. Whipple said, in part, "no one thought that the office would amount to a great deal but now it is one of the most important in the society.

"We have seen. . . ."

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"We have seen. . . ."

## TWO KINDS OF ASSISTANCE

The reporter can expect four or five volunteer helpers, eager to enlighten him as to the "true facts" of what is going on. These earnest and thoroughly honest folk nonetheless almost always are partisan; they represent some particular viewpoint and are trying to push that viewpoint so that it will color the reporter's entire story. They explain, often in whispers, that, "The next resolution is the one that counts. This is the showdown between the conservatives and us liberals. You haven't heard much about this, because the bunch in power is trying to kill our resolution. Hannify, the publicity man, probably didn't mention it to you. He's against us. This resolution is the big thing; you don't want to miss any of the debate that's coming. It will be the hot spot of the whole meeting."

Eager and well intentioned, these informants see the meeting in terms of their pet interests, and overlook all else. Sometimes they will be right in their interpretations, and other times dead wrong. The more he has circulated among the members, the more accurately the reporter can judge how much stock to take in what these volunteers tell him.

Sometimes a meeting subdivides, with several round tables or discussion groups meeting at the same time. From the in-charge man or the publicity official, the reporter finds out which probably will be the best gathering. That one he attends. To cover the others, he conscripts helpers. The in-charge man introduces him to the chairmen of the other meetings, and the reporter arranges with these men to supply, either themselves or through someone they select, resumes of what the gatherings did and said. If the gatherings have secretaries as well as chairmen, the reporter can expect rather good abstracts, for the secretaries in their official capacities must keep full accounts of the sessions.

Features or human-interest material often can adorn the reporter's work. The preference is to run it as a separate story rather than attempt to crowbar it into the main and straight-news version. A collection of tidbits or "convention sidelights" makes a readable "with" story. This trivia is full of personal touches. Dr. Edgerton, 82, who hasn't missed an annual meeting since

1919, surely merits a paragraph. So does the fact that Dr. Jacobs spoke in favor of one resolution and his son-in-law, Dr. Henderson, spearheaded the opposition.

#### AN UNPLOWED FIELD

Annual meetings are full of officers' reports. The treasurer tells how many members have paid their dues, the secretary reports on the condition of the records and asks for a new typewriter, and the president reviews the year. Because many reports are loaded with statistics, reporters sometimes dismiss them with a snort. They deserve better than that. If they are of interest only to members, roll them into a compact "with" story. Now and then they will entice the casual reader. Attorney Barton, intrigued because the bar society has eleven fewer members than last year, hunts up the figures for each of the past twenty-five years and gives as part of his report an analysis which shows that a quarter-century ago the state had one lawyer for every 949 population, whereas now it has one for every 1,110—but the lawyers howled as loudly then as now that the field was so overloaded that no one could make a living. "Well, I'll be," says many a casual reader. "I didn't know that before."

The reports often yield good, if brief, stories, so that the news gatherer is missing an opportunity if he stops listening when the presiding officer announces that, "Our efficient secretary, Jim Stanley, will now tell you how our membership stands."

The speech that the organization ranks as the best always comes last. If it came earlier, too many members would sneak out as soon as it was done. Holding the prize speaker until the end also holds the members. Ordinarily this prize speaker does give the best talk, but the reporter cannot disregard the other addresses in the belief that the last will not be the least. The fact that this "imported speaker" came all the way from Washington, D.C., is no guarantee that he will have the brightest quotations with which to beckon to the casual reader.

If Reporter Dick is on the job he will draw from the meeting at least half a dozen tips for feature or "magazine section" stories that he can round up later. Lawyer Prentiss is referred to by the toastmaster as "the only man in this county who ever made a



living as a patent attorney." That's a new slant; interview Prentiss some day and find out how he developed the patent trade and some of his interesting experiences in it.

#### ANNIVERSARIES AND CELEBRATIONS

"Dick, hobble over to Newbury tomorrow and get fed up on the old-home day," the city editor directs.

"Oh, please, chief; please don't," Dick protests, but the city editor is adamant.

Dick may or may not find the old-home day interesting. Much depends upon his fondness for sandwiches made the day before and now beginning to dry. The story, however, will have eager and appreciative readers if Dick gives it the proverbial half a chance of appealing to them. If he presents it expertly, the story will attract many readers who care not one whit about Newbury and its old-homers.

The nature of the anniversary or celebration is immaterial; whatever it may be, the potential readers are many. These observances bite deeply into the emotions. Usually they commemorate an anniversary and offer the participants the always enjoyable opportunity of recounting the past and "remember-whening," that is, in one way or another, "living it over again." Other times they honor some person, group of persons, or institution and hence are first cousin to the always inviting "success story." The city editor may attract no new readers because he gives Newbury's old-home day a complete story, but he will make present readers more appreciative of the paper. And so Dick, despite the grumbling, goes to Newbury.

Sometimes a celebration story writes itself. The program includes a parade or a pageant, and hence finding material to write about is easy. Other times the affair is largely of the picnic variety with one or two speeches and hours of reminiscences. This is what Dick fears will be the case tomorrow; what will he have to write about?

Plenty, in either case. Consider now the picnic celebration. Nothing happens, except for the two speeches and the election of officers of the Newbury Old Home Day Association, yet 150 persons attend. Something other than thirst for overbrewed coffee

brought them together; if Dick can isolate that something and charge his story with it, his work will be of assured success. Finding that something demands learning about Newbury. Dick immerses himself in the newspaper's library, skims the history of Newbury County and looks at the chronicles of previous old-home days. He discovers that Newbury was settled by New Englanders who had had any amount of trouble with the Indians back in Massachusetts or Connecticut. They had been raided and set upon; when they emigrated, they perched their new settlement atop a hill, so that any Indians infesting the new land could be discovered before they approached too close. The town expanded, threatened to become an industrial center, and then dwindled until today it is a handful of houses, two churches, and three filling stations.

One speaker, welcoming the sons and daughters (and grandsons and granddaughters) of the Newbury pioneers, declares, "The little old town still looks good." This forsaken, dinky place still look good? Dick mutters; what consummate claptrap. Yet the remark gives him an idea. He circulates among the old-homers, talks with them, listens to them, and finds that the Rev. Mr. Davies spoke for all of them when he said "The little old town still looks good." Economic drabness and geographic dullness may be undeniable, but the homestead town "still looks good." That is why the former residents have gone to the trouble, and expense, of coming back today to eat sandwiches and recall bygone years.

Dick remains an infidel, but a most practical one. "The little town still looks good" becomes the theme of his story, curling through it like a river through flatlands. He gives the welcoming address of Mr. Davies two paragraphs of quotations, and the other speech one paragraph, chosen to stress the "still looks good" theme. He reproduces trifles of the picnic-table conversations, selected to show how genuinely happy the former residents are to have another look at the town of their youth. He weaves in references to Newbury's history, to make more evident, by showing how the town has failed to prosper, the reality of that "still looks good." In other words, he writes a mood story. A good

workman, he does not overdo it, for he does not want gush and drivel.

A fortnight later the city editor passes him three or four letters. "That Newbury yarn certainly satisfied them. Those people liked your story enough to go to the trouble of writing in about it. By the way, your semiannual raise isn't due for six weeks, but perhaps we can get it for you a little ahead of time." Yes, the Newbury sandwiches were dry and the ants got there first, but Dick isn't the man to hold grudges.

In writing that story, he had to avoid five faults:

1. Too skimpy specific information. Only because of his "research" did Dick know the Newbury history. Without that knowledge he would have been forced into generalities such as, "Newbury's long and distinguished history," which every "old-homer" would have recognized as claptrap and would have resented.

2. Gaudy adjectives, mostly cliches. A mood story crumbles unless its diction is consistently appropriate. Spreading it on too thick is the surest way of spoiling the story.

3. Failure to get into the spirit of the occasion and give the "club members" something to "live over again." Unlike many stories of meetings, the anniversary chronicle may be written as much for the club members as for the casual readers. The occasion is one in which the members are so deeply interested that they will be more than ordinarily disappointed, even offended, if the chronicle is flat and empty. However bad it is, they will read, but the paper wishes to capitalize their emotional overflowings and to do so it must satisfy as well as interest them.

4. Lassitude. Leaning wearily against an oak tree, watching scornfully and hoping that the city editor will let him off with a four-paragraph story, the reporter would have been so permeated with ennui that he could not write an absorbing account, no matter how much factual material was at his disposal.

5. Failure to provide anything for the casual reader. Very few persons not connected with Newbury care about the old-home day, but many persons can be stimulated into at least a transient interest. The very idea that 150 persons would "turn out for

one of those affairs" seems paradoxical enough to suggest the query, Why? When Dick explains why, he bids for the attention of the casual reader. He cannot bid for that attention unless he has scored on the four preceding points.

If the celebration has a formal program, Dick's reservoir of material automatically is larger. Story structure can be parallel to that of an all-day meeting, discussed earlier in this chapter, but the five considerations just listed are almost as powerful factors as they were in the Newbury relation. Because the program is mildly impressive and the pageant unexpectedly colorful, Dick may scant the "mood material." Doing so is questionable; the program is much more in focus if the background is presented than if it must stand without adornment.

Look now at a story which in its fourth paragraph brands itself a "first-edition plug," written before the formal celebration began, and see how much theme and mood an energetic reporter pumped into it. For later references, the paragraphs are numbered:

1. Stoughton, Wis.—Today was Syttendi Mai—the seventeenth of May—and Stoughton's Norwegians made the most of it.

2. The Norwegian constitution was adopted on May 17, 1814, and since then Norway and Norwegians in other lands have turned out annually to commemorate the event.

3. The Syttendi Mai celebration here today was the first extensive one since 1928. This year's event was sponsored by the Stoughton Community Club, organized only last January. The celebration was the club's first major enterprise. Descendants of Norwegian pioneers who settled southern Dane county came here by the hundreds.

4. A parade to the old Stoughton market place, now a parking lot, band music, speeches, and folk dance were scheduled for this afternoon.

5. One of the most interesting bits of the parade was a mammoth sea serpent, the idea of John Stokstad, president of the local Sons of Norway.

6. "Since 1928 I've had the head and tail of that serpent kicking around in my basement," Stokstad said. "All last week I've been working back of my restaurant putting the serpent together. I've been waiting for a chance like this."

7. Although this was Independence day, there were few if any firecrackers. Halvor Christensen, a local butcher, recalled that

when he was a boy in Norway there were no firecrackers but there was plenty of noise.

8. "Everybody had a gun because everybody went hunting," he recalled. "We'd just take our guns out and use powder with no lead. That made plenty of noise. If there was a stick of dynamite around, that came in handy too. Many's the time I burned my fingers, I'll tell you."

9. Almost every other store in Stoughton gave over its windows today to displays of Norwegian articles, many of them 200 to 300 years old. A box of corn flakes gave way to an ornate cheese box, made in 1823. A copper teakettle made in 1607 replaced an electric percolator. Festive Norwegian headdresses, woolen socks 150 years old and resembling those now worn by golfers, wooden tools, and ornate shaving mugs were other articles in the displays.

10. "I've never seen as many Norwegian things in Norway as I've seen in Stoughton this week," said Martin Sandsmark, a baker.

This story was chosen because it goes about its work in such a matter-of-fact fashion, with no color-phrasings and purple patches. Analyze it, please:

Paragraphs 2 and 3 present an adequate and specific background for the non-Norwegian reader who asks, "Why are the Norwegians having this celebration?" The Norwegians will find it a compact reminder of when and why.

Paragraph 4, though it admits that the story is a before-the-event plug, gives focusing material by at least hinting the scale of the celebration.

Paragraph 5, telling about the sea serpent, is an attention-twitcher. It says in effect, "This isn't completely the ordinary parade; here's one entry you never saw in any other line-of-march."

Paragraph 6, with its direct quotation, pulls the story away from the statistical or catalog and puts persons into it.

Paragraph 7, telling about the absence of firecrackers, is a good contrast bit, showing wherein the Norwegian Independence day differs from the American Fourth of July.

Paragraph 8, with another direct quote, injects more of the human element into the story, exactly as did paragraph 6.

Paragraph 9, giving the dates for some of the articles on display, provides an authoritative tone. Its explicitness shows that

the reporter has observed closely and can do more than deal with generalities.

Paragraph 10, with another quotation, is the first open and avowed statement of the story's theme, "This is more like Norway than is Norway itself." Yet that theme, by implication and suggestion, ran through the entire story, for all that only at the end was it given directly.

Because the reporter was alert and enterprising, he made even a plug story genuine and satisfying. He "got into the spirit of the thing."

### THE CATTLE SHOW

Dick travels widely throughout the county during the early fall, reporting the fairs, sometimes described belittlingly as "cattle shows" and other times overdignified into "agricultural exhibits." One fair is pretty much like another? Probably.

All the fairs are similar in that a saggy-roofed building named Agricultural Hall is crammed with pumpkins, pies, knitting, and other exhibits, and a big barn gives refuge to the farmers' best cattle and other livestock. Probably the schedule calls for a drawing or pulling contest between teams of horses or, occasionally, oxen.

Dick cares little whose jar of preserves and whose loaf of bread win first prize, but the readers care immensely. Those who attended the fair want the complete list of awards, for when they left the judges had not finished their evaluations. Readers who didn't go also wish to know. "Did that Mrs. Simmonds get all the crochet prizes again this year?" and "Well, Tom Flint's cows didn't do so well this year; nothing better than second prize" are typical comments. Dick acknowledges the readers' right to dictate what the story shall say and presents the full list of prizes.

He describes any contests in some detail. Frank Belden's team seemed likely to win the pulling contest until the gray slipped. The judges let Frank's team try again but the gray didn't have his heart in it any more and the stone boat wasn't budged.

Long lists of prizes are cumbersome reading, so Dick puts high in the story a summary telling about the baked-goods experts whose cake and cookies took more than their share of prizes and

the sheep owner whose Dorsets won every award but one. Brief descriptions of the appearance of the exhibition halls usually are enough, unless the scheme of decorations is unusual in theme or in effectiveness. Compact accounts of outstanding exhibits make good reading. A comparison of this year's attendance with that of last year always is wanted, and sometimes provides a lead paragraph. If the program includes a ball game, Dick finds out whether he is to include it in his story or whether the sports department will run the game separately.

"Rube stuff." Admittedly, but the readers enjoy it.

OFF THE RECORD

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## AN ANCIENT PROBLEM

“WHAT I SHALL SAY NOW is off the record,” the speaker warns. “Any reporters in the audience can put away their notebooks; my next remarks are not to be quoted.”

Perhaps, however, these next remarks are to be quoted; they even may be the lead of the story.

“Off the record” is one of reporting’s older plagues. Lately it has become like the locust, and unless it is controlled it will ravage the news field and devour acres of stories that should have grown to front-page proportions. “Off the record” can be checked by the individual reporter if he understands its true purpose and scope.

Within its rightful field, the “don’t print it” command is wholly justified. Many a person voices remarks under circumstances which would make their publication distressing and damaging. Others, often in prominent positions, provide information useful to a reporter but not printable. A modified “off the record” allows use of the information if it is not accredited directly to the individual giving it.

Baffling? Not at all, for the reporter has a test, simple and workable, for determining whether he should or should not use this disputed information. The test is the distinction between “public” or “official” and “private” or “personal” utterances. Consider how this test operates:

1. In regard to speeches and meetings.

Ward Bacon, addressing the Kiwanis Club, denounces the state board of parole as saturated with politics and chained to the



underworld. By name he accuses each member, charging him with active and shameless malfeasance. Here is a roaring first-page story, whose repercussions will resound for weeks or months, one which may start inquiries that will riddle the state administration as a hailstorm rips tobacco plants. "All this is off the record," Mr. Bacon announces cheerily.

He's right; it is. The Kiwanis meeting was a closed gathering, to which only members and their guests might come. The reporter was present, not because being there was his "right," but because the club gave him the privilege of attending, that is, made him its guest. The meeting in no sense was open to the public; outsiders, however interested, could not gain admittance. It was as much behind closed doors as is the Sunday evening gathering of friends around Mr. Johnson's dinner table. There, too, only those invited can attend; everyone else is barred.

No one would argue that what is said at Mr. Johnson's dinner table is of public concern. The entire social convention protects such a gathering. There the judge and the senator may speak freely, even baldly, for the host-and-guest relationship obtains and everyone present realizes that what was said was for that group alone and must not be bruited beyond it. So, too, with the Kiwanis meeting; the club was the host and the members and their friends were the guests. What was said was for that group alone and must not be bruited beyond it without consent.

#### THIS IS ON THE RECORD

Now shift the scene. Professor Hardy Reckless speaks at the Sunday evening forum of the Sixth Church. Discussing "Honesty in Government," he declares that the governor has accepted more than \$10,000 in direct bribe money, and then smirks, "That is off the record, of course."

Sorry, professor, but emphatically it is on the record. You spoke at a public rather than a private meeting; anyone who wished could come and hear you. There was no host-and-guest relationship. There was no "members only" restriction upon the attendance. You took the audience as it came, the serious and the frivolous, the discreet and the injudicious alike. What you said was as public as if you had mounted a soapbox in Central

Square and shouted it through a megaphone. That only forty persons were present and that 40,000 may read in the newspaper what you said is of no slightest consequence, nor is the question whether you charged admission to your address. You made your remarks for all who were interested enough to listen, and the newspaper is as much a part of "the public" as was the eager gentleman in the fourth pew who nodded vigorously every time you mentioned "vested interests." You have no more right to ask that the newspaper refrain from quoting you than to ask that the eager gentleman put his hands over his ears when you came to the "dangerous" part of your speech.

The distinction between a private and a public meeting is the whole answer to the question whether to honor an "off the record" request. If a speaker does not wish the public to know of what he says at a public gathering, he shouldn't say it. At a private gathering, he has unlimited right to decree that any or all of his remarks be kept from going beyond the restricted group he was addressing.

### WHEN OFFICIALS TALK

2. In regard to statements made by officials. Here, too, the distinction between private and public concern is the touchstone.

Mayor Fordney Whipple inherits \$85,000. How he will spend this windfall is highly interesting, and the mayor tells reporters that he will resolve his debts and buy a house on the costliest street in town. Then he adds, "But that's off the record, boys."

Of course it is. How he uses that money is a personal matter, of no more concern to the public than is the amount the reporter spends each month for cigarettes and beer.

Again shift the scene. The city council has passed an order to buy land for a municipal golf course at a cost of \$24,000. The mayor has ten days in which to approve or veto this order. "I'll wait until the tenth day, and then I'll sign it," he tells a reporter. "But that's off the record."

No, Mayor Whipple; it isn't off the record unless the reporter is willing to let it be so. What you will do officially about an order passed officially by the council is in every meaning of the

word a matter of public interest. If you are unwilling to reveal in advance what you will do, keep silent. Asked for publication what your decision will be, you have but one choice—to tell, or to say forthrightly, "I'm not yet ready to reveal my decision." To tell and then attempt to keep the telling from going to the public is not your privilege, because the subject genuinely is one of public concern. If the reporter wishes to accede to your request, he may do so, but he is fully justified if he refuses to be silent.

In many instances a reporter would do as the mayor asked, simply because retaining the mayor's good will was worth more than printing on Monday a story that automatically would be available on Thursday. If, however, the story were worth the mayor's displeasure, the reporter would be completely ethical in telling the official that the "don't print it" wouldn't work this time.

3. Statements in regard to matters not yet officially in the public domain. Here an official is amply justified in requesting protection.

The state auditor announces that he has exhumed "irregularities" in the bookkeeping of several cities, and hints that "our" city is one of them. A reporter asks Mayor Whipple whether the city indeed has contravened the state law.

"Surely we have," he admits. "They can prove it, too. But our offenses were technical, we weren't trying to make a little velvet the way they were over at Junctionville. It's the Junctionville crowd the auditor's after. We're sitting tight and waiting; we're not going to do anything until he starts action, which I don't think he'll do. That's all off the record; officially, I haven't heard a thing about it."

Right, Mr. Mayor. When the auditor directly declares that our city has broken the state accounting laws, whatever you say is of public concern. So far, however, the auditor has made no official accusation; we have no right to embarrass you if you are unwilling to answer questions about a still hypothetical situation.

Statements made publicly and issues of public interest are usable; statements made privately and issues not yet of public interest rightly can be "suppressed."

## THE UNOFFICIAL CENSORS

The reporter must watch the circumstances under which a "don't print anything" request is made. The Woman's Club is having a regular meeting and the reporter takes a seat far in the back of the hall. Except for the speaker he's the only man on hand and he doesn't relish his prominence. Two determined women converge upon him.

"We don't want any reporter here," they declare sternly. "Go away."

Who are these two women? Surprisingly, they may be a self-established purity committee. They, personally, dislike reporters and hence get rid of every newspaper man they can. Before he leaves, the reporter is well advised to go to the club president or secretary, introduce himself, and ask whether he is welcome. More than one president has stormed in to demand why the city editor persistently ignores her club and has found out that unofficial watchdogs have been chasing out reporters and that the city editor finally decided he had things for his staff to do more useful than getting ejected from meetings.

Then there is the nervous speaker, who says every three minutes, "Don't quote me on this." Because the meeting is private, as at a Rotary gathering, his requests must be observed, though they threaten to ruin the story. The meeting over, the reporter questions the speaker. "Just which remarks were off the record? How about that sentence about the highway commission?"

"That's all right, you may use it."

"And that bit about Senator Burkett?"

"You can use that, too."

The interrogation ended, the reporter finds that only three bits are not usable; everything else has been approved for publication. Failure to find out explicitly what items were off the record has ruined many a good story.

Other times a speaker is entirely ready to make public what he said, but not in speech form. "What I said will stir up a rumpus, and the Rotarians wouldn't like it. I was their guest, and I have to think of that."

"All right, sir. Will you make the same statements in a private interview, with no mention of the Rotary Club?"

"Surely. Don't mention the Rotary Club and you can use everything I said."

In this way alert reporters have salvaged more than a few stories that seemed hopelessly on the rocks.

#### PRYING LOOSE THE LID

"Off the record" sometimes is used to tie up information that should be of free and open access. The subject legitimately is of public interest. The man being questioned answers a query at length, and then says, "That's off the record." Three or four times he does this. By giving his information and then labeling it as "in confidence," he hopes to keep it out of print. The reporter's remedy is to break in and say, "I don't want any more 'off the record' answers. If you're not willing to talk, say so openly." This misuse of "off the record" is increasingly common. Public officials, particularly, are adopting it as a means of silencing controversies. The reporter who breaks up such a hush-hush has done good work. The whole doctrine of democratic government is in jeopardy when an official strangles public knowledge of and interest in affairs important to the citizenry through such a warping of the "don't print it" request.

Very often a person of prominence is willing to talk as long as his name is not used. Mayor Whipple, zealously regardful of the tax rate, is hostile to the \$24,000 golf-course appropriation but he knows that he must oppose it adroitly or he will antagonize aldermen whose help is essential for his own civic proposals.

"Looks as if the council will pass that order, mayor. What'll you do?"

"Don't know yet. I've got to have some huddles with two or three of the aldermen. If I had to decide today, I'd veto the thing. You can say that, but don't quote me on that—don't use my name."

We'll not use your name, Mr. Mayor. The issue isn't officially before you until the aldermen take their final action. If you wish to withhold news about your probable or even possible decision until that final action has been made, it is your privilege.

Our story will protect you by deleting your name. It will say "sources close to city hall expected that Mayor Whipple would veto the order" or "city hall observers predicted a veto."

Frequently an official not directly concerned with an action is able to discuss it authoritatively, though to do so openly would be to risk an accusation of butting into business not his own. The fire chief will say nothing about the statement at the last city council meeting that half the alarm boxes in the city are defective. City Engineer Tim Murphy will talk. "Sure they're defective—have been for years and everybody knows it. If the fire chief admits it, the insurance exchange will boost the rates. It's a mess; something's got to be done or we'll have a fire down in the second ward ramshackle district that'll kill a dozen people because the fire department didn't know anything about it for half an hour."

"You're sure of that, Tim?"

"Sure as I am of my own name. Freddy Welch, the city electrician, will tell you the same thing. So'd the chief, if he dared."

If Engineer Murphy is quoted directly, the fire department will ask snarlingly what he means by talking about affairs outside his province. The reporter is eminently justified in masking his story to protect Mr. Murphy. The fire chief? He's glad to have the situation come to light; now he may get some money with which to patch or replace the alarm system. Yet for him to say officially that the boxes didn't register might cost him his job.

#### NO RETALIATION, PLEASE

Reticent interviewees are not to be punished for taciturnity about personal matters. Vice-President Kingman of the Quality Hardware Manufacturing Company tells of his participation in the businessmen's conference at Washington.

"Is it true, Mr. Kingman, that most of the delegates were drunk half the time?"

If Mr. Kingman wishes to avoid this topic, and manifestly it is a private affair, he is not to be pilloried by a sentence in the story saying that, "Mr. Kingman refused to confirm or to deny reports that the delegates often were intoxicated and that their

condition kept the conference from transacting half of the business on the agenda."

The situation is cheerfully different when the subject comes into public concern.

"Senator, why did you vote against the farm bill?"

Silence, of long duration.

Here the reporter is fully within the proprieties if he recounts the senator's refusal to discuss what he did officially. In fairness, however, the reporter will give the precise question that the senator refused to answer. To say, "The senator would not explain why he voted as he did" gives a different impression, glaringly inaccurate, for it suggests that he was clammish about all of his senatorial actions whereas in actuality he was silent about only one of them.

#### BROTHER TO THE SPHINX

When he does accept a confidence, the reporter must adhere to it regardless of how badly he may be beaten by the opposition paper. The newspaper's whole contact with the public is built upon the thesis that it keeps its word as rigidly as does the most unbending individual. For a reporter to promise not to print information and then to write about that information destroys every thread of belief the person giving the information had in the paper's integrity. A promise made is a promise to be kept.

Breaking confidences is a reporter's professional suicide. The word goes around—rapidly—that he cannot be trusted. The man who was hoaxed tells his friends, and they tell theirs. Soon the reporter finds his news sources dried up. "I don't know," "I don't know," "I don't know," he hears, day after day. The city editor wonders why the reporter brings back so few and such weak stories. He does a little inquiring.

After lodge meeting he mentions the reporter. "Nice chap," says the city editor, "and a fine writer."

"Yes, but, . . ." answers his Brother in the Bonds.

"But what?" the city editor persists.

"I've heard that he can't be trusted too far. Hate to say it, but I've heard it from several sources. Frank Drake told me that that story about him. . . ."

A broken confidence is a reporter's costliest error. No self-respecting city editor has a place on his staff for the liar. When the liar hunts another job, his former city editor gets a query. "Why did this man leave your paper?" Then the other city editor suddenly discovers that, after all, there isn't a vacancy on his staff.

This does not for an instant mean that one man can bottle up information available through other sources. The reporter asks President Durkee of the Quality department store whether it is true that his company has bought the Boston store at Junctionville. Mr. Durkee is a little too expert for the reporter and sews him into a confidential answer that will keep the news from coming out for some time. Next day the Boston store's late owner announces that he has sold to Durkee. Back the reporter goes to Mr. Durkee to explain that the story will be run this afternoon because it has come from an equally qualified source willing to have it printed. By making this return visit, the reporter protects himself and the paper from the charge of breaking confidences. The situation presented in its new setting, Mr. Durkee's unwillingness to release the information well may diminish or disappear entirely. The instance cited here is not manufactured; it is completely genuine.

### THREE SPADES—AND HUSH!

What he hears in his social contacts is not for publication. At a friendly bridge game, Dr. Mott describes a difficult operation he performed ten days ago. "Front-page story" the reporter murmurs to himself. Pardon, but it is no story at all. Only when Dr. Mott has been asked whether he is willing to have the story run is it available. If the reporter converts into news what he hears as an individual rather than while on duty, he speedily builds a reputation as being too quick on the typewriter and people become enthusiastically mum when he approaches. If his news sources shrivel, his value to the paper also parches. It is both good ethics and high expediency to remember that a reporter off duty doesn't know how to use a typewriter and gains that



ability only when the authors of the interesting conversation explicitly give him permission to print what they said.

Nor is it ever allowable to try to break down the distinction between a private and a public meeting. The Lions Club listens to a splendid speech. Says the reporter to himself, "That's too good to bury, even if they do say 'off the record.'" Without that speech, all I can write is that the club met and listened. I'll tell what they listened to." The club has a ready and effective answer. When the reporter comes to the next luncheon meeting, he will be informed that only members are admitted. So, for one story, he has cut himself out of a dozen or a score of other stories, some perhaps better than the one he did obtain. Every member of the club has him blacklisted for ignoring that completely reasonable "off the record" request. Thus before forty or fifty of the more prominent members of the community he has branded himself as a bad actor. That is a fine way to set the city editor to wondering whether he may not have one reporter too many.

These foregoing paragraphs are not to be viewed as suggesting that newspaper ethics are on the downhill road. Many of the comparatively few bits of seemingly offensive conduct are the results of ignorance rather than of malice. An immature reporter thought that if fifty persons heard the Lions Club speaker, he was justified in overruling an "off the record" request. It isn't a matter of how many were there, but of the private or public nature of the meeting.

Journalistic ethics walk with long, confident strides. State and other editors' associations draw up codes of conduct. So do real-estate dealers and bar associations. The codes, however, are strikingly dissimilar. The editors tell in detail how their papers are to conduct themselves in relation to the public; the other groups tell in detail how their members are to conduct themselves in relation with each other. The editors almost never have a word how they shall treat their competitors; their whole concern is with the public. The other bodies have less to say about dealings with the public than with competition. Let the young reporter remember this distinction when someone moans of "our irresponsible press."

## FORGET THE EDITORIAL PAGE

Let him remember also the common accusation that the news columns are warped to agree with the editorial page is a fine case of putting the wagon in front of Old Dobbin. The critics envision this scene:

Reporter: "Man, that was a lively session. That fellow tore into our candidate for mayor."

City editor: "That's bad, very bad. Step down and ask the editor what he's going to say on the editorial page and write your story to agree."

How does the editor know what he will put into his editorial before he knows what happened, what the news is? The actual scene is this:

Editor, emerging from his paper-strewn office: "Anybody go to Schenck's rally last night?"

City Editor: "Yes, Allen did. Schenck harpooned our candidate. It's a page-1 story."

Editor: "Get me a proof of that story. I can't write an editorial until I know how badly Schenck demolished our man."

As for the advertisers and their much touted control of the news columns, three actual episodes are illustrative.

The proprietor of a company advertising generously was arrested for drunken driving. He threatened to withdraw his advertising if the paper mentioned his arrest. He would go direct to the publisher. The paper carried the story, and the advertiser indeed went to the publisher. Next day, the city editor's future book carried a notation from the publisher. It said:

Hereafter all drunken driving arrests are to be reported. There are to be no exceptions to this rule, under penalty of immediate discharge.

The owner of a department store became involved in a gambling episode. For days the gossip spread that the two newspapers were "afraid" to carry a story, lest their best local advertiser sour on them. The reality was that the papers had no story, because of the law of libel. Then one man concerned with the gambling went to law to collect the money owed him. That automatically made the story legally available, and that afternoon

both papers carried two-column pictures of the department store owner. He did not withdraw his advertising; it was too valuable to be thrown away because of personal pique.

A metropolitan paper carried a cartoon series which seemed to reflect disparagingly upon bus travel. An official of the agency handling the advertising for one of the larger bus lines wrote the publisher that unless the cartoon series were changed, the advertising would be canceled. The publisher replied on the editorial page that if he received another coercive letter, the bus company's advertising would be refused. A few days later the executive of the bus company sent an apologetic message, explaining that the advertising agency man had exceeded his authority and that the company had no thought of withdrawing its highly profitable advertising.

Thirty years ago many cities of even 15,000 population had two newspapers. The Republicans had one, and ergo the Democrats must have one. Producing newspapers costs heavily, and the communities were too small to support two publications. The merchant who shouted that he would withdraw his \$7.50 advertisement could expect to be listened to, and perhaps to be obeyed. His little ad was frightfully important. Now there is but one newspaper, of necessity not a party organ, and it is so much better geared to the community that the merchant's \$7.50 is not the difference between meeting or missing the payroll. Moreover, if the merchant cancels his advertising, he has no other paper wherein to regain the business lost by cancellation. Fewer papers has meant stronger and more independent papers.

WAR AND THE REPORTER

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## EVERYONE IS AFFECTED

THE SECOND WORLD WAR has hit the newspaper twice. The first blow was in the pocketbook, for war means higher prices and, often, reduced revenues. In August of 1939 the Monday edition ran fourteen pages; in September it was sixteen because the war news demanded so much space. "When we go up two pages, the white paper alone costs forty dollars," the business manager says sadly. "Add to that the cost of setting sixteen columns more type, correcting it, putting it into the pages, stereotyping, and press work and it turns Monday into a deficit day." War makes headlines, but not the sort that swell the newspaper's tax on profits.

The second blow was in the form of an added strain upon the reporters. The war gave them another highly controversial story whose local ramifications are as argumentative as the main chronicle from Europe. No one is neutral about this war; everyone has flaming sympathies. The Nazis are Attilan Huns, or the English are cruelly selfish. Almost every reader is fiery partisan. One reader is eager for an Allied triumph. A story about the Germans routing an Allied airplane attack dismays him. He hopes it isn't true. He begins looking for reasons why it should not be true. Wishful thinking dyes his brain cells and within an hour he is saying, "That's just a propaganda story." Next day the Allies are buffeted again. The reader's dismay is deeper; he begins to blame the newspaper for giving the war so much prominence. Soon he says, "That's a pro-German newspaper and it always gets excited if Hitler does anything at all." By

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afternoon he has convinced himself that the paper is inaccurate and lying in its war news; next morning he calls it mendacious in all its news.

No editor and no reporter expects that so emotion debauching a story as that of the Second World War can be presented so that all readers will be convinced of the paper's essential fairness and impartiality. The war is too vivid to be viewed objectively. Yet every editor and every reporter wishes to minimize the complaints that the paper is biased, by emphasizing in every possible manner that a reader's quarrel is with the facts of the war and not with the newspaper's recording of those facts. While this is centrally the concern of the copy desk, it affects reporters as well. The reporters must do their utmost to keep the local news from fostering and fanning the antagonisms the war is breeding. This fostering and fanning becomes easier each day, because the longer a war goes on the more it upsets people's emotional balance and the more it sets them against other persons who disagree with them about which side is in the right.

### THE ROAD TO INTOLERANCE

People go through three stages of emotion:

1. "This man, who says the Nazis are in the right, is badly mistaken."
2. "This man, who says the Nazis are in the right, knows in his heart that they are in the wrong. Yet he persists in defending them—he persists *maliciously* in defending them. He is himself malicious and dishonest, as bad as the Nazis are."
3. "*This man is himself a Nazi.*"

Here is George Harrison who went to Europe in the summer of 1939 and was in Berlin when the war broke out. The Rotary Club asks Harrison to tell what Berlin was like on Sunday, September 3, when England and France went to war against Germany. Harrison begins his talk, "The Germans weren't very excited. They looked at the war as being forced upon them by the British. Many Germans told me that they. . . ."

The reporter, strongly sympathetic to the Allies, dislikes to hear of Germans blaming the Allies for the war; he is sure the German viewpoint is a lie. The stronger he feels about it, the more likely

he is to forget that George Harrison was repeating what various Germans told him, rather than offering his own and personal explanation. The reporter forgets that Harrison is a phonograph and sees him as the bandmaster calling for music the reporter dislikes; he makes the mistake of thinking that Harrison is himself defending the Germans rather than telling how the Germans defended themselves. He writes:

George Harrison, in a speech before the Rotary Club yesterday, defended the German cause and accused the Allies of forcing the war upon a Germany that was heart and soul anxious for peace.

This is brutally unfair to Harrison. Because tempers are so short and tolerance so slight in times of tension, Harrison is in peril of being branded all over the city as a Nazi apologist, and of being so branded for things he never said.

Again, a speaker actually may defend the Germans. He has full and perfect right to do so. The pro-Ally reporter will have a searing job to present that speech fairly, without comment, and without insinuation or compression that twists meanings and ignores contexts. He is likely to let sly little words creep in: "Mr. Schmidt defended the *Hun* argument that. . . ." He may go so far as to write, "Saying that the *Huns* had justice on their side, Mr. Schmidt *boasted* that he was proud to be one of them."

Likely enough Mr. Schmidt was indiscreet in defending the German cause, but he was entirely within his privileges and the reporter is not called upon to discredit him or to make him seem a barbarian for so doing.

#### ATROCITY STORIES

The "atrocities story" has been blamed for getting the United States into the First World War. Research indicates that real atrocity stories were surprisingly few, but that genuine news with an atrocity angle was frequent. An American had gone to Canada and enlisted. Some neighbor suggested that his letters home be taken to the newspaper. The letters were human documents whose publication from every viewpoint was entirely justified.

Too often, however, the reporter manhandled the letters and

presented them so that they seemed to be the truth rather than one soldier's view of the truth. He pecked out this lead:

German troops have crucified prisoners of war, nailing them with bayonets to trees and walls. These and other unbelievably barbaric practices are revealed in a letter from William Hinch, 2919 Dayton Avenue, who is fighting overseas with the Montreal Royal Rifles.

No one, in times of excitement, could read a story starting in such a way, and particularly a story involving a fellow townsman, without accepting the "crucifying" as true. What the letter really said was:

We have heard that the Germans are crucifying prisoners of war. I haven't seen any of this, but we hear that up the line another regiment found Canadians crucified when that regiment recaptured terrain it had lost a few days before.

This makes a most different impact from the lead that preceded it.

The reporter today is extremely careful about using war epithets in nonwar stories. The mayor wrangles with the aldermen and finally compels them to do as he wishes. The reporter will not refer to "the mayor's Nazi tactics," lest he give the mayor an unmerited appellation. Public emotions are too unstable and one "Nazi tactics" story can fan a wave of belief that the mayor truly is a Nazi.

The police reporter will be unswervingly cautious about a story that directly or by implication links anyone to a foreign cause, especially to espionage. Hans Frolich has been "away" for three days. An excited and none too well-meaning neighbor gossips loudly that Frolich is in the custody of G-men, grilling him because he is a German spy. Regardless of what the G-men say or left unsaid, a pro-Ally reporter is in danger of interpreting their words or their silence as an admission that Frolich has been quizzed about his "spying." To write that Frolich is suspected, or even rumored, of connection with espionage may do the man an injustice that will hamper him for months or years.

#### LEAVE THE WAR IN EUROPE

Finally, reporters must avoid lugging the war vocabulary into other news. Everyone is talking war and thinking war. Because

they seem new and vigorous, war terms may appear to be good phrasings with which to make stories vivid. These war words, inexorably, have been used so often in the dispatches from Europe that readers are surfeited with them and their appearance in other stories dilutes rather than intensifies those other stories. Carried into other news, the war words may make stories incongruous and in poor taste:

South Memorial Church last night *opened an offensive* when it *massed* its members for a *drive* for \$8,800 with which to *black out* its mortgage.

All over the country business houses that go bankrupt are described as *torpedoed*, football teams that can hold opponents scoreless have *Siegfried lines*, politicians who campaign vigorously are adopting *Blitzkrieg*, and every gathering of three or more persons is a *concentration*.

Even when it is 4,000 miles away, war inflames people's minds. The reporter must contribute to as sane a view of the war as can be had, and not to the hysteria, wild thinking, and unfounded accusations so common to times like these. *It is Europe's war. Don't help to make it ours by stories that ignite passions and prejudices.*



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## 13

### REFORMERS

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#### NOBODY LIKES A CRUSADER

“THE W.C.T.U. HAS AN ALL-DAY RALLY tomorrow,” the city editor announces. He speaks softly, but everyone in the office hears him.

“Good story for the Bishop—part of the church beat,” proclaims a reporter from a distant corner.

“I’m already loaded for tomorrow; I’ll need some help if I can get it,” another reporter puts in.

“I’ll be tied up all day,” chirps another.

The city editor shrugs in sarcastic resignation to the inevitable. “So we’ll have to let the W.C.T.U. go unheralded because all my reporters are so very, very busy? That’s too bad.” He pauses. “No volunteers? I have to draft someone? All right. It’ll be . . .”

A moment of squirming.

“It’ll be Dan.”

Half a dozen sighs of enormous relief; one groan of dismay.

Why should a W.C.T.U. rally, essentially easy to report and including a rather good luncheon, be so eagerly avoided? It is not because the staff disapproves of temperance, but because the W.C.T.U. members are “reformers.” Even the most moderate and tolerant reformer must suffer the dislike vented upon the zealot. The extremists are so very much so that they have brought all “uplift” workers into disrepute, and thereby have provided Dan with a problem in his assignment tomorrow.

Every community has some individuals, and probably some organized groups, eager to remake the world, generally along kill-

joy lines. Commonly their hope is to improve the universe not by making what they regard as "virtue" so attractive that everyone embraces it but by keeping everyone from doing the things the uplifters view as "wicked." The basic motives of many of these eager persons are likely to be good. No one opposes a curb on gambling to keep it from robbing hundreds or thousands of families of their weekly income. A dog racetrack, even in a city of only 150,000 population, in one night can drain away \$75,000, shoved through the betting windows in the hope that each two dollar "investment" will return multiplied ten times or a hundred. The money risked that one night in wagers would provide \$100 scholarships for 750 college students. The country has plenty of excesses whose restriction would be dazzlingly advantageous.

Sadly, the reformers will not learn human nature. They propose a restriction upon gambling, and thousands of persons say, "I'm in favor." Then the reformers add an item or two. There shall be no card playing of any sort and the golf links must be padlocked on Sundays. At once many who favored a curb upon gambling are done with the proposal; it is now too utopian and inclusive. They believe a continuation of wide-open gambling less an evil than the wholesale restrictions sought by the reformers.

Dan and his fellow reporters are highly realistic. They know the limits to which human nature can be rebuilt in a hurry; they view the reformers' plans as unattainable and as curtailing individual liberty so violently that they would create abuses worse than the ones they aimed to abolish. Dan reacts against the almost psychopathic vehemence of the zealot reformer, and often does it so vigorously that he sees all reformers as zealots. Some, perhaps many, aren't.

Thus Dan has a personal hostility to counterbalance when he writes about reformers and reform groups. To him they are inherently vicious and overbearing. He lets his hostility show through into his stories. This hostility may be warranted, but it has no place in the news columns. The paper cannot be objective in ninety-nine stories and prejudiced in the one dealing with the "utopiacs."

## FREE SPEECH MUST BE FREE

Never mind that certain reform leaders indisputably work a racket and live comfortably upon the contributions, donations, and dues paid by the cattle-blind rank and file of the reform groups' memberships. Every work, even newspapering, has its leeches. Most reformers, whether moderate or intolerant, are sincere. They have every right to their opinions and, more important, they have every right to propagate those opinions. If ever there was the refreshing tang of salt in the air, it comes from the American insistence that a minority, however misguided and however unpopular, has the right—not merely the privilege—of presenting and of working for its aims and objectives. It is on this insistence that American democracy is built. If Dan permits his personal feeling to deny even a "utopiac" the full and complete objectivity of the news columns, Dan is miserably pusillanimous.

D. E. Deems, the city's tireless opponent of Lady Nicotine, this morning started another of his spectacular but heretofore always futile campaigns against smoking.

He announced that he had uncovered a city ordinance, passed in 1904, forbidding anyone to smoke while driving an automobile.

Invested with the authority of this ancient statute, which even the police have forgotten, Mr. Deems plans to station himself and members of his Anti-Tobacco League at busy intersections and take down the registration numbers of all cars whose drivers are smoking. The undaunted reformers will turn the numbers over to the police with demands that the "offending" drivers be prosecuted.

Commenting on this newest stunt, Mr. Deems said this morning, "Tobacco distracts a driver and makes him more liable to get into an accident. We expect to have the full coöperation of the police in this crusade."

Police Chief Dennis W. Reardon seemed surprisingly cool to this latest endeavor to make the highways safe. "If the city attorney says there is such an ordinance and complaints are brought, we'll have to enforce it," he said. "I never heard about it before."

Mr. Deems is the city's most ceaseless crusader. He has been aligned with the prohibition crowd for years and the Anti-Tobacco League is his pride and joy. He made the claim today that the league has a membership of 106, but he was unwilling to verify this by making public a list of the alleged members.

Surely, Mr. Deems is a "utopiac." He may be thin-brained, yet he has a right to his peculiarities and to have them presented impartially by the newspaper.

Not all reformers are as offensive as Mr. Deems. Here is an example, with the paragraphs numbered for easier reference when the story is analyzed:

1. The Rev. Elias J. Halpin made good his threat yesterday to have Sunday golfers arrested. Four who attempted to play the Westmoreland Country links were taken to headquarters for booking, but cannot appear in superior court for trial until tomorrow, as Judge Drew is out of the city today.

2. The four arrested are: George A. Snow, accountant, 53 Denver St.; Thomas A. Drown, production manager, King-Smith Co., 82 St. Paul St.; Dr. Harry W. Cole, dentist, 29 Omaha St., and Miss Mary A. Osgood, teacher in South High School, 73 Chicago St.

3. The Rev. Mr. Halpin, minister of the Eighth Congregational church, instigated the arrests as part of his three-weeks-old campaign on Sunday pleasures. He began with a sermon in which he said, "Anyone who plays golf or otherwise profanes the Lord's day, while he should be on his knees in church, is a deliberate sinner."

4. The public discussion following this sermon brought the Rev. Mr. Halpin many condemnations and some support. His blast that Sunday golf is sinful brought especial criticism. He refused to ameliorate his attitude, and last Sunday said in his sermon that if the police did not stop such "profaning" of the Sabbath he would do it himself.

5. Saturday morning he consulted City Atty. John E. Hanson, who admitted, without enthusiasm, that a city ordinance enacted in 1905, but rarely applied, forbids any sort of sports before noon on Sunday.

6. Later Saturday the Rev. Mr. Halpin demanded that Police Chief Dennis W. Reardon detail an officer on Sunday to stop any golfing. After considerable argument, the chief yielded and detailed Officer Francis Walsh.

7. Walsh and the Rev. Mr. Halpin appeared at Westmoreland links about 8 yesterday morning. Only four players were on the course. Halpin compelled Walsh to arrest them, and the entire party drove to headquarters, where the four were booked and released.

8. Halpin and Walsh then drove back to the links to see if there was any more business for them. By that time the usual

Sunday morning throng had gathered, but D. D. Harris, country club manager, had posted a notice that the links were closed until noon. The minister then returned to his church where, it is alleged, he preached a powerful sermon on God's mercy.

9. When the links reopened after noon, most of the golfers were indignant. One group suggested a formal protest to Halpin's church. Among the comments heard were these:

10. "That fellow had better learn to keep his long beak at home."

11. "What can you expect from a buttinski like that?"

12. Informed of the nature of these comments, Halpin grimaced contentedly this morning and promised to be on hand in court tomorrow to testify against the four. "Both God's justice and man's will be done," he smirked.

13. The four who were arrested seemed unworried. The ordinance they are accused of breaking carries with it the possibility of a fine up to \$25 or a jail term not in excess of 10 days.

14. Halpin would not say today whether he will ask the court to give the four "sinners" the jail terms the ordinance permits.

Here is an innocently—but devastatingly—partisan story. Little of its information is objectionable; the damage comes from using the wrong words. Peek into the reporter's psychology and see how personal disapproval of the Rev. Mr. Halpin's crusade fermented until finally the reporter became blazingly indignant:

Paragraph 1: The reporter is reasonably but not completely neutral. Anxious for a vigorous wording, he adopts "made good his threat," prejudicial because "threat" is an ugly word for all that its denotation is correct. Its connotation is stronger, and presents Mr. Halpin unfavorably. This one phrasing can put readers into an anti-Halpin frame of mind.

Paragraph 3: "Instigated" is wholly objectionable. This color word suggests a malicious plotting. Such a word as "caused" might have less crackle but would be properly neutral. "Sunday pleasures" is offensive because of its suggestion that Mr. Halpin objects to any and all enjoyments; actually he objects only to enjoyments during church hours.

Paragraph 4: How does the reporter know that Mr. Halpin received "many" condemnations and only "some," that is, "a few," approvals? Did he count them? "Blast" is entirely too

connotative of intolerance and bigotry. "Ameliorate" says in effect, "He knows he's wrong but he's too stubborn to admit it." A more neutral phrasing would be, "He refused to change his attitude." Surely "profaning" is dangerous; used without quotes its effect is that Mr. Halpin's viewpoint is correct and in quotes that his attitude is completely indefensible. The frequency of the reporter's vigorous but unneutral phrasings is of high significance. The more he revolves the story in his mind, the more he dislikes Mr. Halpin. He doesn't realize that this dislike is increasing and accordingly is not on guard against it.

Paragraph 5: "Admitted, without enthusiasm" will be neutral only if accompanied by a quick picture of the Halpin-Hanson conference, to show specifically the city attorney's lack of zeal. As given here, the phrasing is thoroughly black because it says so strongly that Mr. Hanson opposed the minister. Even if Mr. Hanson did, the reason for his opposition might have been because he thought Mr. Halpin's methods unwise rather than that Mr. Halpin's disapproval of Sunday-morning golf was mistaken. Since the story contains no elaboration to show the nature and extent of Mr. Hanson's disapproval, or nonapproval, readers draw an inference which may be actively unfair.

"Rarely applied" is utterly misleading. Naturally an ordinance that could be invoked only on Sunday morning would be used less often than one applicable day and night, seven days a week, such as the prohibition against parking in front of a fire plug.

Paragraph 6: "Demanded" seems overstrong, unless accompanied by enough details to prove that Mr. Halpin's call was more than a "request." The phrasing, "after considerable argument," may be misleading. It suggests that Chief Reardon said, "Halpin, you're wrong," and then was talked down. Actually the chief may have said, "Mr. Halpin, I'd like to do it for you but I can't. All I have on duty Sunday morning is a skeleton force and I can't pull a man away from regular duty to go to the golf course with you." The word "yielded" is unfortunate, in that it suggests so vividly that Sin-Killer Halpin steamrollered poor, defenseless Reardon. How often is a police chief named Reardon outtalked as badly as this one seems to be?

Paragraph 7: Heretofore, the minister has been "the Rev. Mr. Halpin" but now he becomes merely "Halpin." The reporter is becoming indignant against Mr. Halpin and does not realize that his own boiler has too much emotional pressure. "Compelled" in one word pictures a friendly policeman saying, "Oh, now, Mr. Halpin, won't it be enough if I tell 'em to go home" and a deep-jowled preacher retorting, "You arrest those people or I'll have you before the commission for insubordination."

Paragraph 8: "Any more business for them" is too flippant. "It is alleged" cannot be defended. The reporter admits that he did not go to Mr. Halpin's church to learn about the sermon. He is now so down-with-Halpin that he uses second-hand material, which may be malicious rumor. Yet the dereliction is innocent rather than intentional, as is shown by the qualification of the doubtful matter.

Paragraph 9: "Halpin" again instead of "the Rev. Mr. Halpin."

Paragraphs 10 and 11: These comments, however true, are attacks upon Mr. Halpin as a man rather than upon Mr. Halpin's beliefs. Rarely are such personal assaults good reporting.

Paragraph 12: "Grimaced contentedly" and "smirked" present Mr. Halpin as a conceited little mentality devoid of the least magnanimity.

Paragraph 14: "Halpin" once more, and "'sinners'" is too colorful.

The reporter was aroused enough by this story to dig into it and to present it vividly, which was completely good, but the vividness was a one-track line. Gathering material, the reporter talked to half a dozen golfers and was saturated with their side of the case. His only contact with the other point of view was a telephone conversation with Mr. Halpin, made late enough in the day that the reporter could see nothing but the golfers' picture. Of offensive material this story contains little, but it reeks because its phrasing was not disinfected. Many church members, who may think that Mr. Halpin has gone too far, properly will resent this story because of its constant suggestion that the "church viewpoint" is dogmatic, narrow, and vicious. Poor, poor reporting, due to a prejudice against reformers in general; the prejudice

wasn't leashed short enough when one particular reformer came into the news.

From one point of view, Mr. Halpin is small and mean. From another, he is a courageous supporter of a lost cause, fighting with the only weapons he can find. There is still another viewpoint:

Perhaps the community sentiment is strongly against Mr. Halpin's methods, perhaps against even his desire to eradicate Sunday-morning golf. Nonetheless, thousands of readers, though they disagree with Mr. Halpin, will resent the portrayal of a minister, any minister, so lopsided and intolerant as is this writing. They believe that the minister's position should not be ridiculed simply because the preacher has misused it. They will resent rightly the newspaper's treatment of Mr. Halpin as a slander upon the church as a whole. And it is exactly that.

#### FAIR PLAY, ALWAYS

Here Dan gets a word in edgewise. "Do you mean that the crackpots and the 'utopiacs' must be treated as considerately and objectively as, for instance, a surgeon who has just performed an almost miraculous operation?" Yes, Dan, every bit as considerately and objectively. If Mr. Deems and Mr. Halpin truly are crackpots, that fact will be undeniably apparent when presented in a fair and neutral writing. Their narrowness will expose itself.

Perhaps the worst aspect of the reportorial prejudice against reformers is that it filters through so readily that before Dan realizes it he is writing prejudicially about anyone representing a minority or a slightly unpopular cause, however free it may be of "utopiac" tincture. The Pegasus Club, founded five years ago to give the city the benefit of the Little Theater movement, has deteriorated into a clique of nose-tilters who think mistakenly that they have restored "Art" to the stage and that any play that can be enjoyed is horribly plebian. The Pegasus people are intolerable, and their audiences have dwindled to a few-score persons of their own caliber. Even so, now and then Pegasus is newsworthy. It sponsors a lecture by the winner of last year's Pulitzer prize in drama, who doesn't know what he's getting into. If he did, he wouldn't come. The Pegasus members, at worst, are



unpopular because they are snippy. That doesn't justify Dan in writing:

Another of those drah-matic treats is scheduled for relief of the public's artistic and mental depravity, when the Pegasus Club brings to town. . . .

Even worse is the slurring of a political, racial, or religious group that is an unpopular minority. The Socialist Labor party is so legal that the names of its candidates are printed on the ballot. Party members have been decent, orderly, and law-abiding. Now they ask a permit for a rally in Garfield High School hall. Because undeniably they are "advanced" and "radical," Dan writes:

The city's halfway bolsheviks, the local Socialist Labor party, today petitioned Mayor William A. Sanderson to allow them to use Garfield High School hall for a rally at which they would beat the drum for their red philosophies.

Admittedly, these are extreme examples. They were chosen because partisan writing quickly degenerates into such extremes. There is no such thing as a "trifle" of it; the "trifle" permeates and soon Dan's entire story is affected.

Dan has one infallible test whether his objectivity and neutrality are slipping. If he is willing to show his story before publication to a member of the group about which he is writing, the story is unbiased. If Dan would rather not show it, his unwillingness comes from realization, however far back in his cranium, that the story is slanted and would draw a protest.

Fair play, even to those who themselves sometimes do not play fair, is among the doctrines which have made the American press the finest in the world. Anything Dan does, though the doing may be difficult, to maintain that spirit of fair play is one of his most worthy works.

#### THE SOURCES DON'T DICTATE

This does not put Dan for a fraction of a second under the necessity of letting news sources dictate how he shall write his stories. The free-love advocate he is interviewing shakes her finger and snorts, "Now you say it just the way I give it to you—

that I have exposed the hypocrisy and intolerance of that feeble-minded old Bishop O'Leary." Dan does no such thing.

Under any circumstances, Dan weighs every suggestion about the manner in which he shall write and accepts the worthy suggestions; under no circumstances does he let the news source tell him what he must do. Playing fair with others, Dan is a hard rock in maintaining fair play for himself.

CHURCH NEWS

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## MEET THE BISHOP

THE BISHOP, the church-run reporter, is in a high rage. The Saturday church page, announced at 8 o'clock by the news editor as having room for five columns, is revised at 10 o'clock to hold but three and a half columns, so arranged that the four-column picture the Bishop planned to use is now too wide and cannot be run. His remarks about make-up editors are much more secular than ecclesiastic.

For the Bishop is a specialist reporter who hoed a neglected and weedy little patch of news until today it is a vigorous and flourishing acre where he harvests many good stories, quite a few worth front page. Before the First World War, the "church run" was a major news assignment. During the man-power shortage brought by the conflict, church news faded. In the chaotic post-war years it regained its old place on some papers but on others it failed to recuperate. On these latter papers a reporter who inherits the church beat has received a fine chance to develop a run, and thereby show how much he can do when he has a chance.

However amorphous the reporter's own denominational life, the church beat can be built in any city into a strong department. During the Trivial Twenties it was popular to bemoan that the church soon would be of no influence and would have slight membership. Nonetheless, religion and the church refused to die. Even repeal of the prohibition amendment, which certain denominations had cherished as if it were the very foundation of their credos, failed to kill the church. People by the thousands, and of all ages, are affiliated actively with the church.

Whether the confession of faith or the parish house dance floor is the greater attraction is immaterial; the interest is there. Building up the church beat is not a matter of "educating" readers to accept hitherto uninteresting news. Instead, it calls only for demonstrating that news of high concern to many of them is to be found regularly and generously in the paper.

The church today appeals to its members on four distinct grounds: The purely religious, as in the Sunday sermon and the meeting of the Foreign Missions Society; the social, as in the Men's Guild meetings and the Sock and Buskin Club's amateur dramatics; the intellectual, as in the Thursday Forum and the various study or lecture groups; and the parental, as in the Sunday school and young people's classes. Even in small cities, organization is thorough and efficient and public interest in a church as an institution is likely to be much greater than concern in that church's especial brand of theology.

Cared for in slipshod manner, the church beat yields only a handful of news. The Monday paper carries abstracts of three or four Sunday sermons. The midweek issues have nothing, except when a minister announces that he has resigned to go to a larger congregation, or a church holds its annual business meeting. Saturday the paper presents a "Church Calendar," telling at what time tomorrow each church will have its services. With this calendar goes a despondently incomplete announcement of the forthcoming sermon subjects.

"I know this beat has been weak," Larry's predecessor concedes as he tells the new church reporter about the city's ministers. "I used to try to improve it, but the ministers won't help."

#### COVERING SERMONS

Reviving the church run, Larry begins by improving the existing but scanty coverage rather than by junking it and starting anew on an entirely different track. The Sunday sermons are his first worry. The city has nineteen churches of all sorts, from the palatial Crownhart Memorial to a converted store in a monitor block that serves the sparse membership of the United Holiness.

"Nineteen churches," muses Larry. "Even if I could get every reporter to go to a different church, some sermons wouldn't be covered." He remembers his own Sunday mornings, and concludes, "If they didn't go any oftener than I have in the last year, the sermons wouldn't be very faithfully reported." The first step is to realize that the reporting staff isn't large enough, even if its members could be induced to work on a day off. The sermons must be covered by some sort of volunteer liaison.

The only volunteer whose interest can be counted on as lively enough to insure regular and faithful work is the volunteer with a self-interest—the minister. If other preachers' sermons are reflected in the paper, this minister's sermons must be reflected, else too many parishioners will believe that what he says goes unreported because it can't compete with what his colleagues are saying. He has, thus, an excellent motive for coöperating.

Sometimes the Bishop arranges to call upon each minister once a week and pick up the sermon or an abstract of it. This, however, cuts sharply into Larry's time. With a bit of persuading, he can entice the ministers into bringing the sermons to the newspaper office, with the guarantee that if the sermon arrives before the deadline the Bishop has set up, it will be given a story. A little explaining that it takes the minister only fifteen minutes to make the office—and he's coming downtown every day anyway—but that it takes nineteen times fifteen minutes, or about four hours and forty-five minutes, for the Bishop to make the rounds and collect all the sermons is effective.

Once this system is established, the reporter can keep it going if he watches two pitfalls. The first is a defection on his part. He has guaranteed that the sermon will be in the paper, and in it must be. The Bishop may have to do some missionarying upon the make-up editor, to show him that a sermon omitted means a minister permanently peeved. If Larry sets the deadline early enough, he can have the sermons ready for the copy desk while the news day is adolescent, and the make-up editor won't grouch at setting aside four columns of a ghastly tight Monday paper for sermons if he can count that those sermons will help satisfy the composing room foreman's loud and inevitable howl for "a bucket of early copy—a big bucket."

## MANAGING THE MINISTERS

The second pitfall has to do with the ministers. They're human, and after he has heard often enough that his sermons are better than were his predecessor's, a clergyman may believe that his preachings are the only ones in the city. He finds himself too busy to make the weekly trip to the newspaper office. "If that reporter wants my sermon, he can come and get it." If the reporter comes once, he will come always. Worse, the clergyman won't keep his triumph to himself; he will boast of it to his colleagues, and soon every minister will be saying, "If you are willing to call for Mr. Swazey's sermon, you should be willing to call for mine." Then the automatic feed system breaks down. Larry must be politely brutal about the minister who won't cooperate; regardless of who he is or how strong his sermons are, they aren't in the paper unless he brings them to the office. After his sermons have been omitted three or four weeks, the minister will be coöperative once more.

Once in a great while a minister deliberately short-circuits the automatic feed. Bishop Larry hears increasing talk that the minister's sermons don't align with the abstracts he brings to the newspapers. Perhaps the abstracts are quite ordinary, and the talk is that the sermons themselves are vigorous and glowing. The clergyman has toned down the abstracts so that the Bishop couldn't print "sensational" stories. Other times the abstracts gleam but the sermons don't. The minister writes a better sermon than he speaks, largely because he departs too widely from his notes.

The reporter can cure such a situation. He can go to the church for a few Sundays and get the sermons firsthand, or, sometimes, he can persuade the minister to give him the complete sermon rather than an abstract. Either way, the clergyman will take the hint.

Bishop Larry has some other worries. A helpful minister may offer to write the story instead of submitting the sermon, or abstract, and letting Larry whip it into shape. Once in a long, long while this offer is worth accepting. Usually it isn't because the minister doesn't know news values.

The Bishop sets up no categories of sermon quality. The Rev. Freeman Harder, North Memorial Church, is the city's most consistently interesting preacher, and his sermon ordinarily gets the longest story. Sometimes, however, Mr. Harder doesn't have time to construct a good sermon and presents either a half-polished preachment or one pulled out of the emergency barrel. When he does that, Mr. Harder's sermon story should be cut, unless of course every other minister did the same thing that week and Mr. Harder's therefore is still the best of the lot.

Church population is no criterion to a sermon's news worth. True, 550 persons heard Mr. Harder and only ninety-five listened to the Rev. Allan Dacey of the East Federated Church. The sermons being of equal power, Mr. Harder's commands more space, but not so if Mr. Harder sidetracked himself upon ancient theological philology and Mr. Dacey said that the Second World War is a divine castigation of Mr. Hitler. The "big" ministers sometimes say little, and the "little" ones sometimes say much. Cast iron news judgments won't work.

Nor are they justified on the argument that the city has many Methodists but only a few score of Universalists. The Universalists are not the only readers of the Universalist sermon story. The story must be judged by the degree to which it would interest all readers, rather than Universalist readers. The notion that the city's "dominant" religion must get the longest sermon story does not stand up. The "dominant" church may not have the ruling minister, and readers know it. A sermon is quite like an ordinary speech; it must stand on its own feet.

Whatever his religious affiliations, the reporter submerges them completely. He is an Episcopalian, and St. George's Church has an excellent rector. But if St. George's has three quarters of a column every Monday and no other church has more than a quarter-column, the reporter rightly will be accused of glaring favoritism and the ministers outside his denomination will be less eager to give him their sermons, because they will believe that their offerings will be treated without appreciation or discrimination.

Indeed, it is useful sometimes to give a mediocre minister a somewhat generous story, simply to show him that he is appre-

ciated. The sermon to be so emblazoned should be one of his better offerings, rather than one picked at random.

#### OTHER NEWS OF WORSHIP

"Sermon story" has been used loosely; it suggests that the sermon inevitably is the most interesting part of the church service. It may not be. The special music, the floral decoration, the reception of new members, or even the announcements from the pulpit may outshine the sermon. West United receives eighty-eight persons into membership, the largest group of communicants it has welcomed in its sixty-four years, and the Rev. Thomas Higby preaches drably upon "Gratitude," a sermon that Larry remembers as having been offered about four years ago in very much its present form. The Rev. Marcus Smith at Eighth Baptist discusses "Our Duty to Morality," a singularly routine message, and reads an announcement from George Frost, church treasurer, that the final \$600 on the mortgage will be paid this week, a full year ahead of expectations. Larry must be quick to realize when the sermon is of less strength than some other aspect of the service.

When the ministers bring in their sermons, the Bishop can ask about other news possibilities, so that he is not handicapped greatly by absence from the services. Churches today usually issue printed or mimeographed programs, often prepared somewhat in advance, so that Larry should be well informed as to news possibilities other than the sermons.

Many a story has been culled from the Announcements column. "The Church has received with sincere regret word of the recent death of Mrs. Elvira Doncastle, who retained membership in this Church although she moved to San Francisco seven years ago. Mrs. Doncastle while here had been identified with. . . ." Or, "The speakers at the Thursday Forum this week will be Andrew H. Greene, president of the Second National Bank, and Loring W. Elby, of the state insurance and banking commission. Their subject will be 'Protecting the Public's Money.'" Many older readers remember Mrs. Doncastle, and the Thursday Forum will have two experts speaking upon a lively topic. These bits merit attention.



The church program often provides lists of names, excellent news, although each name must be verified. Central Congregational baptized nineteen children, whose names are in the program, seventeen of them correctly. The parents, grandparents, even uncles and aunts, will find the sermon story enhanced if it includes the name of their family member who was baptized.

The church program is a news mine, if the Bishop will do some prospecting.

### GET EVERY WORD RIGHT

Writing the sermon story is simply writing a speech story, and the suggestions in the chapters on speech stories apply completely in the church field. Special, unremitting attention must be given to accuracy. Because his position is so inescapably public, a minister's utterances always are under the microscope. If those utterances are distorted, he suffers. "Why doesn't that preacher stick to religion?" will be the common comment if he seems to have wandered too far into economics, war, or politics. If actually he wanders too far, the Bishop can do no more than regret, but if the seeming wandering is due to inaccuracy in the reporting, the minister has been shamefully damaged.

Larry is more likely than is the reporter of ordinary speeches to pull a remark out of context. For nineteen of his twenty minutes of sermon, the Rev. Mr. Horne said nothing that would make copy, even weak copy. In a forty-second aside or interjection, he remarked that, "Sunday-morning golf is a worse peril to the nation than is Communism and avowed atheism." Perhaps he even said it with a smile. Here, however, is a lead-paragraph sentence, and Bishop Larry puts it into direct quotation, followed by the other 120 words that Mr. Horne put into that unfortunate forty-second digression. The reporter forgets to say in the lead that this startling declaration was a most minor facet in Mr. Horne's sermon; the story offers the remarks on golf as if they were the central subject of the entire sermon. Readers will draw the inference that Mr. Horne blasted for all twenty minutes at Sunday golf, and will say, some of them angrily, "That fellow has gone altogether too far." The sermon story is in focus and in context or it is mercilessly unjust.

When the story gives strong mention to other parts of the service than the sermon, it employs both a lead and a secondary lead. The structure:

- Block 1: Lead (Sermon or other matter)
- Block 2: Secondary lead (Other matter or sermon)
- Block 3: Catch-all
- Block 4: Amplification of Block 1
- Block 5: Amplification of Block 2
- Block 6: Lists of names, musical programs, or other details mentioned but not detailed in Blocks 4 and 5.

The reporter has two ways of arranging his sermon stories. The first is to run them all into one long account, with a combination lead or a lead and secondary lead. Thus:

"Despite the war, God is still in His heaven and the good things are not all gone out of the world," the Rev. Harmon Clinton said yesterday in his sermon at West Memorial church.

Other ministers commented upon the increasing sincerity of the younger generation, the growing need for intellectual honesty, and the impermanence of temporal values.

The Rev. Mr. Clinton said that the war is a challenge, rather than. . . .

The Rev. Andrew Downie told the congregation at Greenwood Federated church that the younger generation. . . .

The Rev. Herbert Parks said at Elmdale United church that mental honesty is. . . .

The Rev. William Ebbets of South Central church declared that the measure of success. . . .

The Rev. Schuyler Dorns of. . . .

The Rev. Walter Towner said. . . .

(And so on for each sermon not listed in the lead or secondary lead.)

Some papers prefer to start the sermon digests with a statement rather than a name. Thus:

"The war is a challenge," the Rev. Mr. Clinton declared. . . .

"Let the younger generation alone," the Rev. Andrew Downie. . . .

"There are three kinds of honesty," the Rev. Herbert Parks. . . .

"Success can mean failure," the Rev. William Ebbets. . . .

This is livelier, but it does not mark off so clearly the transition

from one sermon to another. The discussion of speech stories explained this point in detail.

The practice of rolling all the sermons into one story saves wear and tear on the copy desk, since only one headline is demanded. Drawbacks are that most of the sermons are submerged, and the story is so long that the make-up editor may be driven farther than ever from spiritual thoughts.

The better way is to make a separate story of each sermon, thereby giving each minister a headline. If space permits, the "sermon page" can be led with a roundup or superdigest of the seven or eight best sermons.

#### SPECIAL SUNDAYS

Certain Sundays, such as the ones nearest Christmas, Easter Sunday, and Palm Sunday give a chance for "mood" stories. These are no ordinary Sundays; they are the ones when even the indolent go to church, the days of especially attractive services. The stories run longer and are much more descriptive. Easter Sunday, with the glory and the hope drawn from the Resurrection, stirs in the churchgoers an emotional response much more fervent than that of a "routine" worship. Remembering always that overwriting is fatal, the reporter fills his stories with color and reproduces vividly the feelings, as well as the thoughts, that motivated the worshipers. His stories will be read eagerly, for the church folk wish to "live over again" the service that so much impressed them. The Sunday linked to a temporal observance, as July 4 or February 22, permits powerful, triphammer writing. These "temporal links" are rational or mental rather than emotional. The minister refers to July 4 as a day for gladness, but it is a very different sort of gladness from that which he diffuses on Easter.

One of Bishop Larry's problems is what to do with the minister who is a publicity hunter. This man preaches always in shouts, his statements are extravagant, even fantastic. "Patrick Henry said 'Give me liberty or give me death' because he was a coward, not a brave man." The minister may be making an ass of himself, but the reporter can do nothing about it. It is every man's privilege to aim for page 1 in his own way. What the re-

porter must beware is the mistake of thinking that all of this spectacular fellow's sermons are going to command half-column stories. When this preacher has made a reputation as outspoken and daring, he is likely to become less vehement. Then the reporter adjusts his story to its new value.

The front-page marksman is unpopular with his colleagues, and he can hurt the reporter. The other ministers believe that the publicity addict is taking an unfair advantage of them, and they resent the prominence Larry gives him, a full column for him, three inches each for them. Let Larry verify that the resounding sermon really resounds; it may be mere word-juggling. Let him also be politic by boosting the other ministers to four inches, even if it means trimming the ecclesiastic contortionist from twenty to fifteen inches. And certainly let him be quick to cut down the acrobat's prominence when the scintillating sermons degenerate into twistings of the vocabulary.

Many speakers, and ministers in particular, bid for space by an adroit device, that of damning the newspapers. A preacher works into his sermon some attack on the newspapers for printing too much war news, too much crime news, or too much sports news. The reporter, wishing to manifest his own and his paper's fairness, reproduces these remarks at far more than their worth. He fears that if he doesn't build his lead upon such a statement as, "Severe condemnation of the press for its treatment of the war," those who heard the minister will accuse the paper of "suppressing" an "unfavorable" speaker. Many a divine has obtained much more notice than his sermon warranted simply by tossing into it an ounce or two of antinewspaper talk.

Surprisingly often, if the reporter is keen enough to see it, this diatribe gives itself away by being thoroughly dissociated from the rest of the sermon. The sermon was built upon II Chronicles 10, "And he set the sea on the right side of the east end, over against the south," and the attack upon the press had nothing to do with geography. When the attack is integral to the sermon, lead with it; when it is shotgunning for page 1, give it what it deserves and no more.

The Saturday church page is a journalistic hash. It offers advance notices of sermon subjects and music, but these very often

are deadly alike. Fifteen or twenty of them, alternating between "The sermon tomorrow at . . . church will be. . . ." and ". . . will be the sermon topic of . . . at . . . church tomorrow" are doleful reading. If the page is only a bulletin board, it is too feeble. Larry must invigorate it. He has two safe practices. One is to have each week a "lead story" of some particular church activity. Grace church, for example, announces plans for its annual summer school, or West Memorial finishes its fiftieth year, or East United prepares to welcome its bishop. The other practice is to save for Saturday such stories, gathered in midweek, as are safe and will not be used earlier by the competing paper. Now and then, if the city editor allows, the rival Bishops work out a treaty whereby certain types of story, which each will be sure to come upon during the week, automatically or by special arrangement are held until Saturday.

Pictures often decorate the church page. The minister whose sermon topic seems particularly appropriate is good for a one-column. New officers of East United will make a two-column or a three-column.

### HOME MISSIONS

The reporter must meet a within-the-office contingency. The Saturday page must run about the same amount of type from one week to another, so that the make-up editor knows what is coming. Saturday is a thin-paper day and his eight to fourteen pages give him no elbow room. For the last three weeks the church page has had about three columns but today Larry buries him with seven columns. The make-up editor simply cannot accommodate the overflow without wrecking other pages. If he knows that the Saturday page always makes four to five columns, he can plan a regular placement for that page. If, once in a while, a marked departure from the normal is inescapable, he should know of it early, the day before if possible. The make-up editor's coöperation burns brightest when the church page is a definite quantity rather than something as variable as the price of gasoline.

The reporter must be a politician. The news and make-up editors appreciate the Saturday church page and the Monday

sermons page, but they believe that the other days provide better offerings than Dorcas Guilds and Foreign Missions Society meetings. With all due respect to these gentlemen, who may be much more experienced newspaper folk than is the Bishop, they are cyanotic. They fight all day to crowbar 200 columns of news into eighty-eight columns of space. Here is a Dorcas Guild story about two one-act plays or about a speaker who, when she was in India, almost met Ghandi. "Bishop, did you know that we're tight today? What do you mean writing half a column on this Dorcas society?"

Yet the Dorcas story is distinctly worth while. Thirty persons attended the meeting, thirty others wished that they could, and sixty more wonder whether the Dorcas of today is like the Dorcas of their own younger days. Sadly, the reporter writes the Dorcas story flatly, with two or three bromides and a consistent lack of sparkle. If he is wise he will ponder the Dorcas story a bit, and equip it with a first-line feature. He will put into it his best writing, to make it powerful—but not freakish. If he writes the Dorcas story so that it suggests a good headline, the copy desk's sales resistance dilutes. Agreed that the desk shouldn't have a prejudice against midweek church stories, that prejudice exists, and the reporter will do better if he recognizes it and neutralizes it than if he despairs that "I can't get more than a paragraph on Wednesday or Thursday."

Some Bishops don't face this problem, because they never get any Dorcas news. Because it is not incandescent, the reporter ignores it. He should prize it, for it is this news which gives the individual newspaper reader a chance to see his own name in print, one of the finest of delights. Moreover, many of the things said and done at these "trivial" church activities can interest the general reader if told skillfully enough. They are good in that they can appeal to the generality of readers, and good again in that they are a strong antidote to the unreasoning yet clamorous complaint that "there's nothing but war and murder in the paper."

Covering these affairs will keep Larry more than busy. Very likely, except for Saturday and Monday, the city editor gives

him enough other assignments that he has limited time left for the church beat. Unless he can prove to the city editor that the churches are a major, everyday work, the reporter must handle the midweek Dorcas Guild on the wing. This demands that he know enough of each church activity to tell which few are so good that he simply must be there himself, and which can be covered by telephone or through a volunteer. Some of the more active groups will appoint press chairmen, who, if trained by the reporter, provide enough information for him to write a reasonably good story. He can manage the other groups by arranging to telephone a responsible officer or member after the meeting and find out in that fashion what was done and said. That these tidbits must be followed carefully is no excuse for overlooking them. Their regular and enthusiastic coverage will be powerful factors in developing the church beat into one of the paper's more important assignments.

If the minister is convinced that the paper truly wants this news, he will go out of his way to assist in collecting it. Most important, perhaps, he will keep Larry informed as to forthcoming gatherings good enough to warrant the reporter being on hand.

The church's annual meeting always is covered firsthand. Now and then Larry uses it as payment for real or fancied debts and lards it with flattering adjectives. The church has just completed a "most successful year" during which it has "notably swelled its membership" and has "vastly improved its financial situation." If he says all this of Grace church, he must say it also of West Memorial and East United. Praise and adjectives must be used always, or never.

#### PLEASE BE TOLERANT

One of the reporter's difficulties comes with the tiny "fringe" churches with imposing names. Far out on Mapleshade Avenue, in what once was a grocery store, are a hundred folding chairs and a homemade altar, the physical equipment of the Church of the Brothers and Sisters of Jehovah's Covenant. The pastor six days a week works in a bakery. The church is on the Holy Roller or "shouter" order. The worshipers punctuate the sermon

with throaty "Amens" and the service ends with the week's "sinners" coming forward to confess publicly and shrilly their failings. "Freaks," Larry mutters. "I can't bother with them."

No, he cannot bother with them as much as with the affairs of West Memorial, with 1328 members and a pastor, \$9,000; an assistant pastor, \$2,500; a director of young people's work, \$2,000, and a full-time visitor, \$1,040. Yet the members of the Jehovah's Covenant church are at least as sincere as those of West Memorial, for all that their worship seems primitive. Moreover, as high a proportion of their members read the paper. If the Jehovah's Covenant church never is mentioned, its members will believe rightly that they are the victims of discrimination. However bizarre a tiny sect may seem, it is worthy of at least routine attention. Certainly it is not to be ridiculed; ignoring it is better than using it for "comic relief."

The Negro churches too often are overlooked, though they fare somewhat better than the Jewish synagogues. Where these peoples have been persistently and protractedly unmentioned, the reporter may be met with suspicion. His request for news will not be believed, or there may be a fear that he intends to write humorously or disparagingly. Larry must be sincere and persevering. Probably he will do well, at least until he is known and accepted, to gather most of his information second-hand instead of attending the more ceremonial activities. A gentile may be resented at a Jewish observance, until he has shown through his writings that his interest is genuine and sincere rather than the product of transient curiosity and a desire to exploit the ceremony for color-story purposes.

Roman Catholic services ordinarily receive far less space than do the Protestant. There are two reasons. First, the clergymen have not been as receptive to publicity as have the Protestant pastors. A Congregational communicant "should" go to church as part of his religious obligation, but a Roman Catholic "must" go, else definitely he is derelict. The Roman Catholic priests, accordingly, have not viewed sermon publicity as have the Protestants. Second, many Catholic churches have three or four services on Sunday morning, whereas ordinarily the Protes-



tants have but one service. The Catholic services are not all alike; several are likely to be "low masses" without a sermon, and very different from the "high mass" worship. Full coverage of all of a city's Catholic churches easily could run into far more space than the newspaper would think appropriate.

The practice has grown up, therefore, of overlooking many Catholic services and attending only to the few at which a particularly emphatic sermon is given or at which a communication from the archbishop or other dignitary is read. How does the reporter know when such an occasion is coming? That he does not write regular sermon stories for Catholic services is no excuse for failing to have close contacts with the church, its clergy, and its parishioners. Sometimes a clergyman will tell him that Sunday will bring a bit of news. Sometimes a well-disposed communicant, often a member of the newspaper personnel though not necessarily of the editorial staff, will provide either an abstract or a full account of the sermon or other utterance to which he listened on Sunday.

Admitting that covering the Roman Catholic churches often is harder than watching the Protestant, these churches should receive more space than they do. The clergy is not inherently "opposed" to newspaper mention; certain kinds of information, such as a transfer of priests, even may be brought to the newspaper. So are "tips" about anniversaries and observances. Closer cultivation of Catholic news sources is worth while, for Catholic readers are many. If the reporter hesitates to develop these sources, or is shy because he is an "outsider," he is not covering his territory properly.

#### ASK FOR GOOD DISPLAY

Saturday and Monday are the usual "church page" days. Since church news on other days is irregular, the daily "church column" is found on few papers. The midweek stories run without benefit of a departmental overline, such as "Religious News," and of mention in the front-page news index. Persuading the make-up editor to use the "Religious News" heading whenever there is a half-column or so of type is worth the effort. As a

news department, the churches are of extremely high potentiality. If the reporter digs hard enough for news, he will have the make-up editor using the department label almost every day.

The churchmen's language is worth the learning. One clergyman prefers to be known as a "pastor" and another as a "minister." Bowing to these preferences helps the Bishop's friendliness with the preachers. Another help is dispelling any notion that the churches are news only when they can be discredited or disparaged. In some cities a minister never is interviewed for his opinion upon a serious topic, but if an itinerant evangelist 750 miles away garners a wire story because he proclaims that the world is flat and that the devil resides permanently in New York or Chicago, half the ministers in town are asked whether this represents "the church's views." If a lawyer leaves at midnight after swindling the estate for which he was conservator, the fact that he was a Sunday-school superintendent is emblazoned, but the work of that Sunday school in raising funds for the American Red Cross gets no space at all. Ministers and laymen of these churches believe, and understandably, that the newspapers regard them as news only when they are wicked. Larry may have to do some vigorous preaching to counteract this belief, not always as well grounded as the somewhat sensitive churchmen insist.

The Bishop doesn't wear a gates-ajar collar with downturned corners, but he is shepherd nevertheless of a news flock well worth guarding. Since the flock has been neglected in many cities, the reporter who develops church news from "if" to "must" shows emphatically to the city editor that he is one of the better workers.

INTERVIEWING

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## A VALUABLE SKILL

“HARRY, TAKE A RUN over to Sherman Avenue and interview George Griggs. He’s been a railroad man for fifty-two years. Engineer most of the time. He retires on Saturday. He’s one of the most active fraternal fellows in this section—Masons, Odd Fellows, and general what-nots. Find out what he’s done and what he’s going to do when he retires. He’s a lively old codger; give him a lively story.”

Nothing indicates that the city editor is giving the reporter a chance to write his own ticket in the future. It seems an ordinary assignment; in fact, placid. Deceivingly placid. The city editor could have added, “This will be one of the more interesting local stories of the week. I wouldn’t risk it on a cub except that we have enough material about Griggs in the files to pull us through if you stumble.”

“Thanks, Chief,” replies Reporter Harry, grinning. He has waited for this chance; he knows how much it may mean to him in the way of professional and economic advancement.

Interviewing ranks high in the list of journalistic skills because it is the basis for so much news. Interviewing is merely obtaining information through asking questions. Consider how many stories rest wholly or largely upon this procedure.

The mayor “announces” that he will veto any order the aldermen may pass for more traffic lights on Harrison Avenue. Actually, the mayor was silent until a reporter interviewed him. Wilbur Davis, just back from Rio, declares that German influence in South America has been overrated. Mr. Davis didn’t

know that his views were of public interest until a reporter interviewed him. Principal Henry Truman of Garfield High School explains recent changes in the curriculum. He never thought of telling the citizens what his school was doing, until a reporter interviewed him.

John Sebring's garage burns at 3 A.M. The entry in the register at headquarters describes the fire in forty-seven words, but the paper gives it 250. Those forty-seven words suggested to an alert reporter, who had been happily asleep at the time of the blaze, that this fire might be apart from the ordinary. He did some interviewing and had a story three times the value of the one merely rewritten from the fire lieutenant's report.

The Campbell-Walker factory is to be enlarged and will require seventy-five additional employes. This cheery news was known to a handful of business executives but came into general knowledge only when a reporter chased by interviews a rumor that "one of the plants on the South Side isn't having such a big shut-down this summer as usual."

Dr. Milton Derry tells the General Hospital staff of developments in spinal anesthesia. The physician smiled when a reporter asked permission to sit in on the meeting. "I don't think there'll be much for you to write." The doctor's talk is polysyllabic. The reporter is utterly sunk, but he interviews the doctor after the meeting to get the medical jargon translated into more comfortable language.

Listening to speeches and adapting governmental or other public records provides a good quantity of the day's news, but much more grows entirely from interviewing or is developed and expanded through interviewing. The city editor needs many and capable question-askers.

They should be easy enough to get? Sadly, they aren't. Asking questions may be simple, but having them answered fully, truthfully, and enlighteningly often is difficult and delicate work. Frequently the persons questioned must be convinced that it is fitting and desirable that they answer. Other times their tongues are greased and they talk too willingly, with many words but little truth. The reporter then must dig deep to find out what is genuine and what is the biased or propaganda view that the

overloquacious informants wish him to peddle to the public. Again, interviewees may be glad to give information but haven't the first glimmer of an idea as to what is news and what isn't. They will talk for half an hour and say nothing printable. Unless the reporter directs them so that they say things that make copy, the interviews are worthless.

Dealing with the stubborn, the mendacious, and the bewildered, demands that the reporter know human nature and its workings. Unless he can "manage people" he will not get them to answer questions. His work is greatly like that of the door-to-door salesman. A splendid preparation for newspaper work is to spend a summer vacation selling books, brushes, or aluminum frying pans on commission. If the salesman doesn't learn how to deal convincingly with people, he will have no commissions and will dine on dandelions. His stomach will compel him to become a good salesman, and the spreading of this skill into good interviewing will be a simple and natural growth.

An even better preparatory summer can be spent soliciting newspaper subscriptions, though such jobs are fewer than those in the sales field at large. Soliciting subscriptions will give the salesman excellent insight into human nature in general and also into the public's reaction to the newspaper. From studying this reaction, the salesman will derive an appreciation of newspapers and their relation to the public that he could obtain in no other manner.

"A reporter meets so many people he's bound to pick up a lot about how to manage them." Not always. Many reporters can interview when the circumstances are favorable, but are helpless as infants if their quarry is reluctant or deceitful.

The governor of a nearby state, mentioned increasingly as a presidential possibility in the next election, comes to the city on private business, and slips in so quietly that it is nearly an hour after midnight before the morning paper's city editor knows that the dignitary has arrived. Governors, even those nurturing presidential boomlets, dislike to break their sleep to give interviews. The hotel management will be a hindrance rather than a help in reaching the governor.

"See what you can do, Jack," the city editor directs. Jack

slips into a telephone booth. Dulcet words, and honeyed. Jack emerges. "He's grouchy, but he'll see me."

Though time is short, Jack invests a few minutes in the newspaper's library gleaning a quick view of the governor's background, so that he can frame appropriate questions on his way to the hotel.

Every city editor wishes he had half a dozen men of Jack's caliber on his staff, and is thankful if he has two, grateful if he has one. The reporter who has interviewing as his specialty makes an irrefutable bid for preferred and appreciative treatment. His growing ability in the field cannot escape notice. He has chosen one of the quickest and surest ways of bringing favorable attention to himself.

The city editor of half a century ago took pride in the instruction he gave his cubs. Today he hasn't time to teach the youngsters. They learn for themselves, or they don't learn.

An interview normally begins long before the reporter knocks on the door. It has two preliminaries.

#### FIND OUT WHO HE IS

The first preliminary is to learn everything possible about the person to be interviewed. Who is he? What has he done? What are his likes and dislikes, his hobbies, and his peeves? Recall the vacuum cleaner salesman. In the first minute or two, before he seemed to remember that he had a sales talk, he indulged in apparently idle chatter. Really, however, he was establishing a familiarity with his prospective customer. The family pup nosed at his ankles.

"Hello, little fellow," the salesman murmured.

"Prince, go away," the housewife commanded. "Don't make a nuisance of yourself."

The salesman noticed how she said it. Her manner suggested indulgence; she warned the dog away because that was the social gesture, but her voice suggested that anything Prince did was perfectly all right. "Dog lover," the salesman judged, and stooped to pat Prince.

"These are nice dogs—so friendly."

The salesman may wish fervently that all dogs were hot dogs,

but within sixty seconds he has shown the housewife that he is intelligent enough to appreciate a superior canine when he sees one. This discrimination implies, of course, that the housewife had equal discrimination in selecting a dog of such quality. She hadn't intended even to let the salesman into the house, to say nothing of listening to his talk. But this isn't an "ordinary" salesman, this is a man of perceptions and appreciations. Two minutes later he is demonstrating the incomparable superiority of his vacuum cleaner.

The salesman had to estimate his prospect at the scene; the reporter has a chance to estimate in advance. First he looks in the newspaper's reference files, to see what the clippings there may tell about the person to be interviewed.

Should the files yield nothing, the reporter turns to other sources. If the interviewee is prominent, the reporter consults such biographical encyclopedias as *Who's Who*. He may go to the public library to look in the *Who's Who* relating to the interviewee's particular occupation. He may inquire of other persons known or likely to be associates of or acquainted with the one to be interviewed. "Dr. Ferguson, I'm to interview Dr. John Boyce, the New York eye surgeon. He's in the city overnight. Tell me about Dr. Boyce, who he is, and for what he is best known."

Some interviewing, inevitably, must be handled in such haste that the reporter has no time to find out the interviewee's background. These lamentable occasions should be avoided if it is at all possible to do so. "Why bother? He'll be simple enough to handle." Perhaps the reporter is very right in being glad that he doesn't depend on vacuum-cleaner commissions for his cigaret and movie money.

When the interview suggests that it may focus upon a particular topic, the reporter learns as much as he can about that subject. The interviewee, enthusiastic about and expert in that specified field, will take no pleasure in talking with a reporter whose ignorance is as vast as the sandy Sahara. "Why waste time on this empty-headed fellow?" If the reporter can follow a discussion intelligently, without interrupting every six seconds to ask for some rudimentary explanation, the interviewee will under-

stand that he is talking with someone who knows a little of his own lingo and can be expected to get his quotations correctly.

The interviewee is freshly back from Liberia where he spent two years as an official at the Firestone rubber plantations. "Liberia, just where is it?" the reporter asks. "It's the capital of Monrovia, isn't it, or is it one of the British colonies?"

### WRITE OUT THE QUESTIONS

The second preliminary to the interview is preparing in advance a list of questions. "I'll think up some as he talks to me." There may be dismayingly little chance for that. The interviewee may talk as fast as the Twentieth Century Limited making up fifteen minutes of lost time and the reporter may be so busy mastering what is being said that he has no interim in which to devise questions. Or the interviewee may be taciturn. He sits stolidly, with a flicker of sarcastic smile, and now and then murmurs a disconcerting, "Yes?" Rather more likely, the interviewee wishes to be helpful but doesn't know what to say. He depends upon the reporter for prompting and the reporter fails him. The outcome is twenty minutes of faltering words valuable enough for a story not more than two paragraphs long.

The reporter is the ringmaster, regardless of how important the person being interviewed. The reporter directs the interview, swinging it away from unproductive discussions and over to aspects that promise to be worth printing. He cannot count on "ad libbing" questions well enough to be a genuine master of the situation. An architect doesn't give random directions to the carpenters building a house; he has a detailed plan, so that he knows precisely and completely what should be done. The reporter without a plan for the interview is almost sure to be hopelessly in the mire. He will get no more information than he could have obtained from a two-minute telephone call.

Two other dangers leer at the unprepared reporter. The first is stage fright. This is the first governor he has interviewed. The dignitary is at ease, and his secretary is condescending. Dignity and austerity rebound from the walls. The reporter realizes that his trousers are sadly out of press. In contrast to the Chesterfieldian governor, the reporter is a country bumpkin. His



self-confidence phizzes away like the air from a punctured tire. He can't think of a single question. Had he in advance prepared—and memorized—a series of queries, he could draw now upon them merely by rote memory and thus survive the minutes until his self-possession returns.

The other peril comes with the interviewee who answers questions but will not volunteer information. His replies are curt. "Yes." "No." He simply won't unwind. Every random, stop-gap query he parries with a monosyllable. He, rather than the reporter, is the boss. Had the reporter thought out a plan of attack, his interview would have enough direction and unity that even the one-word replies would give the foundation for a fair story.

### THE VITAL FIRST MINUTE

The first sixty seconds often determine whether an interview will be successful. The good interviewer introduces himself formally as a reporter. He wishes no misunderstanding of his purpose; he wants no interview to be frosted at the end by such a remark as, "Oh, I didn't realize you wanted to print this. No, no, you can't use anything I said. I wouldn't want to see that in the paper."

The inexperienced reporter probably has knocking knees and fluttering heart. He is intruding, taking the time of a busy person, asking impertinently personal questions. He wishes he had gone into schoolmarming or selling used cars. Three times he walks around the block before he can force himself inside the building. Let him chase away this state of mind, and quickly. A touch of stage fright early in the game is good, even if it spoils a couple of stories, for it will lead to more thorough work later. But the stage fright should not persist.

The reporter is no intruder, begging a few crumbs of time from an overbusy man. He is saying in effect to the busy man, "Of the city's 20,000 (or 200,000) residents, you are the one best able to speak authoritatively and discriminatingly upon this certain subject. You are an authority and an expert. That is why I have come to see you." Surely it is no insult to take a man's time because he is the person best qualified to discuss a topic that thou-

sands of readers will find interesting and important. Accordingly, the reporter conducts himself with a natural, and hence probably somewhat informal, dignity. He does not apologize nor does he belittle himself. To apologize is to tell the interviewee, "This really doesn't amount to anything; what you have to say is so inconsequential that it makes little difference whether I do or don't find out about it."

When he presents himself, the reporter can expect a definite and frequently vigorous response. Sometimes he will be welcomed heartily; other times, discouragingly. How he meets this initial response will determine appreciably whether the interview is productive or barren. Six types of hostile response merit mention:

1. "I don't like your paper; I think it's rotten and I don't want to talk to anybody from it." This may be a thoroughly sincere statement, or it may be a maneuver. Some interviewees believe that if they make a reporter fight for his story, he will write it at length and give it a good position in the paper. They don't realize that the make-up editor decides whether it goes page 1 or page 27. Others, notably when they have something to conceal, pick a quarrel in hopes that it will keep the reporter so busy that he will forget the questions he came to ask.

Whatever the motive behind the "I don't like your paper" reply, the reporter does not attempt to argue and convert the interviewee. Instead, he lets the criticism bounce off. "I'm sorry to hear that. We try to make it a good paper." Many an interview has burned out because the reporter spent thirty minutes defending his paper and then, before he got to his questions, heard a triumphant, "By jove, I have another appointment now. So glad to have met you."

2. "I don't want to talk. I've talked to you reporters before and I've always been misquoted." This response may be an evasion, but there's a fair chance that it is sincere, however inaccurate. The reporter makes no defense of other interviewers by recounting the pressure of newspaper work and the resultant inevitability of error. To do so would be to admit that, "This interview, too, will misquote you." After a brief and sympathetic acknowledgment that being quoted wrongly hurts mightily, he

counters with a vigorous assurance that nothing will go astray this time. "Before I leave, I'll verify everything you say, so there won't be the slightest chance that I have anything wrong."

3. "Why do you come to me? I'm not news." Such a response may be true modesty and surprise or it may be full hypocrisy. Whatever the case, its treatment is the same. "Part of our job is to know who can speak as an expert." Whether this reply is a trifle of flattery or is an appreciation of the interviewee's actual news worth is immaterial; the reply usually works.

4. The egoist who fattens upon insulting newspaper workers. For a cause that the psychologists haven't fully unraveled, some individuals, normally polite and courteous, regard a reporter as one to be abused and reviled. A few others, with exalted notions of their own eminence, believe that they fail to call attention to their greatness unless they are forever sulphuric. Still others, who don't wish to talk but haven't the directness to say a courteous "No" and make it stick, use the insult as a device to sidetrack the reporter.

Once in a while, if it can be done with a quick and penetrating phrase, the way to handle such an egocentric is to deflate him. Generally it is best to ignore his discourtesies and proceed directly with the questioning. If the reporter climbs down into the gutter to meet the interviewee on his own terms, he may win the word fight but he is likely to lose the interview.

5. "I'm too busy. Can't give you more than a moment." This response is met frequently, for many persons regard themselves as doing a week's work every day. Some of them do. Then they need all the more the refreshment of a few minutes' diversion. The reporter's tactics will be to say, "I'll be brief—take only a moment or two." Once the tremendously busy man begins talking, he's more than likely to continue for longer than the reporter wishes.

6. "No statement until next week." This can mean three things: first, the news really isn't ripe; second, "I'm just showing off my own importance by making you work hard for your story"; third, the interviewee already has given the rival paper the information and wishes it to be exclusive to that paper.

When the news genuinely is unripe, the interviewee usually is

willing to explain why. The show-off probably is a person of minor or recent prominence who hasn't learned that he is still a mortal. The third man has a grudge.

How to handle the show-off is a matter of sizing him up. Sometimes the procedure is to shrug and say, "I'll come back then if I haven't anything better to do." Show-offs dote on publicity and will talk now rather than risk that the reporter may not return. Other times an argument is indicated, perhaps with an adroit hint such as, "The city editor really wants this story today and plans to give it a good display. We don't know what'll happen next week; it might be only a little story then." The grudge-holder is worth a bit of work, because if he remains unconverted he may use the same trick again and thus cost the paper another story. Finding out what his complaint is may very well permit an explanation that gets him out of the peeve. "You know, Mr. Harmon, local news didn't stand a chance that day—the Second World War was just starting and a story had to come from Europe or Washington to get any space. The war was the reason your statement was cut to one paragraph."

These "sample responses" are not at all intended to suggest that the reporter must fight for every interview. Often he will be received warmly, even deferentially. Many persons need no reminding that they are complimented in being chosen for interviews.

### GO TO HEADQUARTERS

Though there are exceptions, it usually works out that the bigger a person and the greater his actual importance, the more willing, courteous, and helpful he will be to an interviewer. The newly rich, the social climber, and the accidentally prominent are the ones most given to using a reporter as a target for their imagined self-importance.

Often the young reporter tries to get information from subordinates. They cannot talk, or the executive will discipline them for trespassing upon his prerogatives. Especially is this true when the desired information deals with policies. The reporter is trying to find out how much or little truth is in the increasing rumors that the banks again are becoming adamant about fore-

closing on mortgages. He asks a bank clerk who smiles and says, "Really, I wouldn't know." Of course that clerk knows, but a bank officer, one of the few men who decide upon policies, is the only person who can speak with authority. The clerk is protecting himself when he pleads ignorance.

When the situation is intricate or when the reporter knows the executive to be difficult to approach, he may go to underlings for preliminary information, obtained under strict pledge that it will not be printed until an executive's consent is obtained and that the executive will not be told that the subordinate did any talking, even of the off-the-record sort. Finding that the reporter already knows the information, the executive who otherwise might kill the interview with "I have nothing to say" may ask himself, "What's the use? This man knows it already," and be willing to speak, if only to ensure that the reporter has the story in accurate form.

Interviewers have two traditional nut-cracking devices. The interviewee is silent as a statue and the reporter budes him by stating an item so outrageously distorted that the man talks in order to correct it.

"Our information, Mr. Marble, is that your company will close its plant here and consolidate everything at the Northville factory. I didn't think it was true, but it must be, since you don't deny it."

"Nothing of the sort, young man. This is our main factory; Northville is only an overflow plant. All we're doing here is to shut down two departments while we install new machinery. They'll be open again in three weeks."

He's started talking now; he'll continue.

The other device is more dangerous and requires acting ability. The interviewee may try to frost a reporter by out-staring him. After forty seconds of silence, the reporter should squirm; after a minute, he should seize his hat and run. If the reporter has the histrionic power for it, he does the waiting-out and makes the other man do the squirming. It is well not to experiment with this technique when the interview is important; it's too akin to poker in that the man loses who blinks first. Its success comes from the fact that men often aren't as resolute as they believe and

that they expect to be taken at their proclaimed value and aren't prepared to resist a challenging of that value.

#### STEPS IN THE INTERVIEW

Consider the framework of the interview with the engineer about to retire after fifty-two years on the railroad. It divides into blocks:

Block 1. The reporter introduces himself and establishes a friendly feeling with the interviewee. This may be the first time that Engineer Griggs has been interviewed, and he's more nervous than a seven-year-old speaking a piece at first-grade graduation. During this part of the interview, the reporter looks directly at the interviewee—but doesn't stare at him—and calls him frequently by name. Engineer Griggs replies in kind. It is, "Mr. Griggs," "Mr. Haskins," "Mr. Griggs," "Mr. Haskins," and within a few minutes Mr. Griggs is well acquainted with Mr. Haskins, regards him almost as an old friend rather than a new acquaintance.

Block 2. This is the part where the reporter gets Mr. Griggs to talking. Sometimes it can be combined with block 1; other times it cannot. The reporter judges as he goes along how fast he can work. If Mr. Griggs is a self-starter, almost any question will serve. If not, Reporter Haskins becomes a fisherman and baits him with a few "ticklers."

"I suppose railroad work is much different now from what it was when you began, Mr. Griggs?"

"Yes, it is." Silence. Try again.

"Have very many other men on this division been with the road as long as you have, Mr. Griggs?"

"I guess there aren't right now, Mr. Haskins, but my father was with this railroad for fifty-five years."

"You fifty-two years, your father fifty-five. That makes 107 years for two generations. That's some sort of a record, isn't it, Mr. Griggs?"

A bit of a smile from Mr. Griggs. "I guess it might be. And do you know, neither one of us was ever called on the carpet for a dressing-down."

Here's a possible lead for the story. With a little appreciative-

ness from the reporter, Mr. Griggs is well started in his reminiscences.

Block 3. Here the reporter adjusts his questions to two purposes. First he draws out Mr. Griggs upon the interesting "never on the carpet" aspect, since that certainly will be a high spot of the eventual story. Second, he suggests other topics to broaden the scope of the interview and learn Mr. Griggs's views of various subjects. "When I was young, an engineer was lucky to earn \$800 a year," Mr. Griggs remarks. With this as a starter, Reporter Haskins brings up social security and old-age pensions. Then he tries still other angles.

"What part of your work did you dislike most, Mr. Griggs?"

"I've always been afraid some crazy auto driver would get hit when he tried to beat the train to the crossing."

Here, surely, is a topic worth expanding, since many who will read the story are automobile drivers.

Block 4. This final phase is largely a verification. Reporter Haskins checks the several remarks he thinks most usable for the story. He asks again about names, dates, facts, so that he will be sure he has his material correctly. If he is hazy about a topic, he brings it up now. It is in this division of the interview that the reporter protects himself against a later complaint of misquotation. Not only does he himself go over statements a second time, but he compels the interviewee to do so, too. If the interviewee has said something he later wishes he hadn't, he is in poor position to complain about the reporting of his statements, for he had this second chance to correct or modify them and he rejected the chance.

Shall the reporter take notes, or rely on memory? That depends entirely upon the interviewee. Some persons are greatly reassured when a reporter puts what they say into writing. They are confident that what they have said will be reflected accurately, and are willing to talk freely. Others become timid and tongue-tied. "Oh my, everything I say is going to be right there on the front page of the newspaper. I've got to be careful and not say anything I'd be sorry for." Two minutes of this state of mind, and the interviewee wouldn't say without qualification and reservation that Wednesday will follow Tuesday.

Early in the interview, the reporter pulls out a sheet or so of copy paper and asks soothingly, "Do you mind if I write down that remark of yours?" He watches the interviewee's reaction closely. If the reaction is of willingness or relief, the note paper stays in sight; if it is of shyness and worry, the paper goes back into the pocket.

When note taking seems to annoy or frighten an interviewee, the reporter relies entirely on memory, but as soon as he is out of the building he hauls out the note paper and records the interview.

Likely as not the interviewee strays away from the topic. He was being asked about his homemade telescope, but he seems to revert every five minutes to his trip last summer to British Columbia and the Yukon. The reporter must be alert to decide how far to let the interviewee roam. Some tangents are worthless digressions; others bring a story better than the one the reporter had planned.

#### BRIGHTENING THE STORY

The interview story gives the reporter opportunity for a little missionary work with the city editor as the heathen to be converted. The depression years, with their tight papers, compelled shorter and more compact stories. Interviews were clipped to "what he said" with all suggestion of personality removed. What the interviewee looked like, how he acted, in brief, what sort of person he might be, was dropped; there wasn't room for it. The often interesting "way in which he said it" was lost. Today, with newspapers recovering somewhat in size, reporters are justified in restoring the "human element" in interviews. A man's words reflect him, but not so completely and interestingly as do his words plus a description of his appearance and actions.

The human element allows the interview to be one of the most intimate and friendly forms of newspaper writing. It permits narration, description, and conversation. To cut it to a blunt question-and-answer is to turn it into dried beef, nourishing as porterhouse but less tasty.

High among the faults in the interview is failure to tell at the outset who the person being interviewed may be. The news



identification should be high in the lead, because it shows the justification for having an interview. Consider these examples:

Swedish politics are as clean as a newly washed dish, John Nygard, 213 Western Avenue, said yesterday. Sweden has political parties, as does this country, but even the politicians regard service to the nation as more important than party prestige, he explained.

Who cares what John Nygard may think of Swedish politics? Why should his opinion be worth reading? Oh, he has just returned from Sweden where he saw conditions firsthand? Say so in the lead:

Swedish politics are as clean as a newly washed dish, John Nygard, 213 Western Avenue, who returned last week after a five-month tour through Sweden, said yesterday. Mr. Nygard visited all parts of Sweden in obtaining material for a genealogy of his family.

Sweden has political parties, as does this country. . . .

The interview growing out of an event in the news a day or so ago must be tied directly to that event, for some readers may have missed the original story and therefore will see little significance in the interview unless the tie-in is prominent. Look at this blind lead:

All three hospitals in this city have emergency electric systems so that operating rooms will not be thrown into darkness if the regular circuit fails, superintendents of the hospitals said yesterday.

To a reader who merely glanced at the paper day before yesterday, this cheery statement seems trivial. If the news peg is inserted, the interview becomes of much greater meaning:

Emergency systems will keep the lights going in the operating rooms of this city's three hospitals, their superintendents said yesterday, even if the regular circuit fails, as it did Monday at Faraway, Canada, where two patients died because surgeons could not continue their work when the lights went out.

The interview story is a fine place for fresh and original writing. All the grammatical devices listed for speech-story leads

are usable. For interviews to be monotonous because of repetitious structure is inexcusable.

When the reporter's queries are answered with a blunt "Yes" or "No," he avoids jerkiness by incorporating both the question and the reply into the same sentence. First, the wrong way:

"Do you believe that the city tax rate can be reduced next year?" Mr. Baines was asked.

"No," he said.

"Do you blame Mayor Sanderson for the \$1.70 jump in the rate this year?"

"No," he said.

Half a column of such writing would be deadly. Avoid it, thus:

The city tax rate cannot be reduced next year, Mr. Baines said, adding that he did not blame Mayor Sanderson for the \$1.70 increase this year.

Good ethics sometimes, but not always, protects the interviewee who refuses to answer questions. If the topic is of entirely private concern, his reluctance to talk is no slightest justification for a lampooning story crammed with reportorial indignation. If Henry Wheeling doesn't wish to tell what he will do with the \$5,000 prize money won in a radio "why I like No-Nic cigars," the reporter says "Thank you" and goes his way. The subject is thoroughly personal and Mr. Wheeling's reticence is entitled to respect. But if the topic be of public import, the reporter has both justification and obligation for telling that the interviewee was silent. Mayor Sanderson won't discuss Alderman Ross's complaint that the Ward 4 streets always are the last to be cleared of snow? Present the mayor's refusal, but do it fairly by giving both the question as well as the refusal to answer.

A young reporter sometimes goes astray by interviewing himself. He attempts by slanted questions to entice or compel the interviewee to express the reporter's viewpoint. When he sees that he is only a sounding board, the interviewee is likely to lose all interest and get rid of the reporter as fast as he can.

## BE A GOOD LISTENER

One of the best ways of encouraging an interviewee to talk more freely is to show an interest in what he says. A yawny, ceiling-gazing reporter is no spur to loquacity. Many a half-reluctant interviewee has become voluble because the reporter was a good listener. The most interesting topic in the world is "I." The reporter uses this quirk of human nature to get more complete and more interesting stories. Good, eager listening is of double value to the reporter. It forces him to follow what is being said so closely that his chance of misunderstanding and misquoting is negligible.

Learning to listen has yet another merit. It helps the reporter control the interview. The listless reporter lowers his head and gives his smattering attention to jotting a few notes. Since the reporter seems bored, the interviewee stops talking and all momentum is lost. The reporter may have extremely hard work to restore it. Perhaps worse, the interviewee simply dictates a statement, as if he were talking to a stenographer, and the reporter misses all chance for questioning to obtain explanations or elaborations or to bring the interview back from a tangent.

Eager listening does not mean that the reporter stares the interviewee out of countenance. That will dry up his remarks and be quite as damaging as to ask a question and then look out the window while it is being answered. The "happy medium" between the extremes of listlessness and of breathless expectancy is best.

Interviewing is among the most fascinating parts of reporting. The office's best interviewer never complains of routine and monotonous work; he is meeting and coming to know too many interesting persons. A missionary today, an exconvict tomorrow, a governor-elect the day after tomorrow; his work is high in variety.

Writing the interview story is essentially the same work as writing a speech story. The structure applicable to one serves also for the other. This is inevitable, for the principal difference

between speech and interview is that one is "formal" and the other is "informal" talking. The specimen that follows shows the structure of an interview story:

*(First block: the lead, which includes the news event that justifies the interview)*

Putting speed governors on taxicabs will not make them safer, Police Chief Dennis W. Reardon said today in commenting upon the plan to be invoked next month at Capital City, whereby all taxis must be equipped with apparatus limiting speed to thirty miles an hour.

"Traffic is so heavy today that not being able to get out of the way of other vehicles causes many accidents," Chief Reardon explained.

*(Second block: secondary lead, summarizing other main comments)*

Traffic problems here are not comparable to those of Capital City, the chief said. Local ordinances already give the police power to deal strictly with reckless cab drivers, he added.

*(Third block: the catch-all, given here to a quick explanation of the Capital City plan)*

Capital City taxi drivers must meet the cost of installing speed governors, and any taxi with a governor not in working order will be subject to a ninety-day suspension of its license.

*(Fourth block: elaboration of the lead. Note how much direct quote is used, and how, in the paragraphs marked with a \*, question and answer have been combined into a single statement.)*

"The governor plan sounds good for Capital City," Chief Reardon explained. "That town is flat. Flat as a billiard table. Our city is full of hills, steep ones, too. Three of our main streets go up steep hills. A car has to have pick-up to make those streets safely."

\*Taxi drivers here have good records with the police, the chief said, and many drivers have run cabs for years without arrest or accident.

"It isn't like that at Capital City," Chief Reardon explained. "They have a college there and half the drivers are college boys, working in their spare time. They're young fellows, and they have to cover a lot of miles in a little while or they don't make any profit."

*(Fifth block: Amplification of secondary lead.)*

\*Traffic in this city is different from that of Capital City, the chief emphasized. There, because of the State House, out-of-town

motorists, unacquainted with the city ordinances, are as numerous as in-town drivers. As a result, speeding taxis in Capital City are an unusual menace, since the drivers cannot expect other motorists to know the ordinances.

"If a driver here is reckless, we hit him hard," the chief declared. "Our ordinances provide that conviction for breaking any traffic ordinance brings a loss of the cab driver's permit for at least thirty days. It isn't a matter of a three dollar fine; it's a matter of three dollars and no job for a month."

\*This situation is not found elsewhere in the state, the chief added. Because of it, he said, taxi drivers here are probably the most careful in the state.

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## 16

### INTERVIEW FORMS

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#### LOCAL FOLOS

THE CITY EDITOR relishes good interviews; often they are among the best read local news. He dispatches reporters on three kinds of interviews.

First is the folo (follow), catching a "local end" for some piece of out-of-town news. The Interstate Commerce Commission allows the railroads to tack another dime a ton to their charges for hauling coal. This is a "national" or at least a "regional" story, with no direct and immediate application locally. To obtain that application, the city editor hurries a reporter to the city's fuel dealers to ask whether they will absorb the charge or pass it on to the customers, and how much ten cents a ton will mean to the city in a year.

The city editor has an almost infinite supply of subjects for these interviews. An *action* that might be duplicated in his city or might affect his community is an appropriate topic. One example was given in the paragraph above; others would be:

Another city, which has had nickel-an-hour parking meters for a year, decides to abandon them. The interview would build upon the question, "Should our city give up or retain its meters?"

Another city in the state passes an ordinance requiring any newcomer with a criminal record to report to the police within twelve hours. The interview question would be, "Will this action cause criminals to come to our city instead of going to the other one?"

A *trend* or a *situation* elsewhere can be converted into a local folo. Another city reports an appreciable increase in the number

of swindles or confidence games. "Is the same thing happening here?" would be the basic question for a folo interview.

A *forecast* or *prediction*, as opposed to an action or a trend, can spur an interview. The Hebronville Chamber of Commerce predicts a sharp upturn in employment in the textile mills in its neighborhood. "Will our textile mills share in the better business?" would be the basic query.

The second form is the interview based not on some particular event but on a particular person, who, because of past or present prominence, is interesting. Every city has an assortment of residents, well known and well informed, who express themselves clearly and quotably. When spot news runs thin, two or three of these helpful persons are interviewed, generally on topics high in the current interest, though occasionally on whatever subject comes handiest to mind.

The entire issue is to know enough of these people so that the same two or three aren't being interviewed three or four times a week. When the headlines are too full of "Conrad Asserts" and "Conrad Declares," it is time to locate new interview sources and give the obliging Mr. Conrad a rest. It is advisable also to restrict the interviewees to subjects about which they naturally may be well informed. The Rev. Dr. Hagemann talks willingly, but that is no excuse for asking him about the freak weather in Iceland when everyone who knows him realizes that his closest approach to the Arctic was a three-day visit in Quebec City.

These "person" interviews take two principal forms. The first is an "opinion interview," in which the person questioned explains, amplifies, or clarifies a topic strongly in the news. The second is the "feature interview" in which the news peg may be slight. The city editor learns that John Henderson has fought in five wars. Though there may be no news peg on which at the moment to hang an interview, Henderson is automatically interesting, and a recounting of some of his experiences will make good copy. Probably some sort of news peg can be devised, such as the one based on the question, "Mr. Henderson, are the wars now in progress worse than the ones in which you fought?"

The society page and the one-paragraph "City News Notes" suggest many and many an interview. Mr. and Mrs. John

Brickmann have just returned from a 6,000-mile vacation drive through sixteen states. What they saw and why they prefer the home city make a readable interview. Dr. William Andres leaves next week to attend the dentists' regional convention. When he returns, he can talk interestingly on dental developments; perhaps he will have information of high value to the thousands of wearers of false teeth. Fred Kirby wins his insurance company's award for the greatest percentage gain in sales in the district. While his pride is still at its peak, ask him how he did it. Hundreds of other salesmen, insurance or otherwise, will find the story fascinating. Mrs. Althea Johnson, twenty-five years an alumna, goes back to the state university summer school "just for the fun of it." When her six weeks of study are done, she should give a crackerjack interview. If he reads the paper thoroughly, the young reporter will have no difficulty in finding suggestions for unassigned interviews which will impress the city editor.

The third interview is the symposium or sampling of public opinion, now in undeserved decline. It lost popularity some years ago because doing it well is so exacting that many reporters flunked. Recently it has suffered from the enterprise of Dr. George Gallup and his American Institute of Public Opinion. The alert Dr. Gallup maintains interviewers in dozens of cities. Whatever the high news of the day, Dr. Gallup slips the leash on his staff and a few days later the newspapers have a story on the nation-wide reaction to the bigger news. With mass interviews so readily obtained, the home-grown samplings of public opinion have been overlooked.

This is outrageously unfortunate, for no nation-wide survey has as much reader interest as a local endeavor with direct quotes and names of persons known to many readers. Some city editors wisely are using the Institute surveys to stimulate a desire for at-home samplings rather than as a substitute for them.

#### SYMPOSIUM STUMBLING BLOCKS

Even before the Institute blossomed, the local symposium was withering. It was hard to do, and easy to spoil. When man-handled it was a waste of space. It had three faults:



1. The persons questioned weren't well chosen; they weren't in positions or circumstances that made their opinions interesting. Judge Hammill of municipal court announces that the old penalty of two dollars for illegal parking doesn't bite deeply enough and that hereafter offenders will go to jail for two days. "Think it's a good idea?" the reporter asks. "Doesn't mean a thing to me, son; I'm just visiting here for a couple of days and I came by train." In this form the visitor's opinion certainly is without interest. With better interviewing, he might have recalled that his own city once tried an equally zealous campaign which did or didn't succeed, and that therefore he expects the local effort will or won't work. Too many reporters didn't do the extra interviewing to make the visitor's opinions meaningful.

2. The symposium was clogged with comments that all read alike. Half a column was given to quotations with identical meaning and almost parallel phrasing. This defect was due entirely to inadequate planning.

3. The writing floundered. Himself rather muddled about it all, the reporter threw his story together with a pitchfork and trusted that readers might know what it meant.

Because so many reporters mangled the group interview, city editors began to forego it, on the argument that no symposium at all was better than a bad one. Many editors will be glad to revive the symposium once they dare hope that a staff member can do a good one.

The edition has run and the staff is relaxing or getting ready to go home. "That Hammill story about sending them to jail for overparking brightened the front page a lot," the junior reporter comments. "Superior court will have to have night sittings to take care of the cases up on appeal from Hammill's bench."

The city editor nods his agreement.

"Say, how'd a public-opinion survey on the idea go tomorrow?" the reporter asks.

The city editor shakes his head. "It'd go beautifully," he declares savagely, "only we haven't anybody who can do one. The last man who could do that job right was Fred Bevins who went up to Chicago eight years or so ago."

"I think I could do one for you."

A most superior smile from the executive. "Oh, you think you could, George? I'll be surprised if you can. Still, you might as well get it out of your system. You'll have your regular work tomorrow, but if you can squeeze in a symposium, go to it. If it's any good I'll page-r it and if it's what I expect I'll put it on the dead-spike."

Reporter George has a new star in his crown if he succeeds. His first work is to determine which residents will have active interest in Judge Hammill's bright idea. "Auto drivers." Not all of them; some use cars so little or under such particularized circumstances that they won't react. Those who will react must be chosen from diversified situations so that they say more than a parroting, "Me, too."

George lists the various breeds of motorists, to see which ones will or won't be imperiled by the judge's plans. Among his findings are these:

"Taxi driver—you bet. Suppose his fare says, 'Stop right here while I go into that office building for a minute or two,' and it's a no-parking block. If a policeman comes along, does that mean two days in jail for the taxi driver or for the fare who had him stop there?

"Woman shopper—we'll need one of them. The sign says 'One Hour Parking' but she gets held up looking at new hats and there's an officer waiting when she breaks loose finally.

"Better get a shopper from one of the suburban towns, too. She might not know about the new system. What she has to say ought to be good.

"Get someone coming out of a doctor's office. You go in expecting to be done in twenty minutes, but nine people are ahead of you and you wait an hour and a quarter before your turn comes.

"One of the merchants has to be on my list—what'll this thing do to his business if people are afraid to drive downtown?

"A truck driver would be a good catch. What will the new system do to him in making deliveries and pickups?

"One of the chaps who runs a parking lot ought to have something to say. It might mean happy days are here again for him.

"Probably he won't say much, but I'll ask a policeman if he'll

hand out tickets so freely when it means two days as he did when it meant two dollars.

"Lots of people have been worrying about law and order. I'd better ask one of them whether this new idea will help or hurt respect for the law.

"Yes, and a pedestrian, too. A pedestrian doesn't like drivers, and he might have something warm to say."

Notice that Reporter George has picked persons whose viewpoints will be different. Thereby he has gone far in eliminating the "I think so, too," answer, for each of these persons will have a different reason behind his reply.

The next step is to decide where each of these persons can be found readily. The shopper from the suburban town, for example, can be spotted quickly. The reporter knows which stores enjoy most of the suburban trade and can tell from registration numbers, muddy fenders, or other signs which cars brought in-town and which brought visiting customers. He knows what lunchrooms taxi drivers frequent when off duty. With a whisk of foresight, the reporter plots an itinerary that finds him his interviewees with the least legwork.

Now he frames the questions. To keep the interviews on the topic, he has a universal question, in this case, "What do you think of Judge Hammill's proposal?" To provide variety he has a particularized question for each person, an inquiry designed to bring out the viewpoint that should characterize the group that person represents. Thus, for the out-of-town shopper, the question may be, "Will you continue to come here or will you go to Junctionville for your trading?" and for the in-town shopper, "Will you drive your car as heretofore or will you take the bus?" With an individual question for each interviewee, the reporter will have no chorus of, "That goes for me, too."

### WRITING THE SYMPOSIUM

Clear to the core, the symposium is different from the ordinary news story. First, the symposium probably has a much longer lead, because it carries so much material that one paragraph cannot begin to hold it all. The lead must do four duties:

1. It must summarize the results of the interviews. In doing so, it must be specific rather than general. "A variety of opinions was expressed" is soporific; "Five out of seven persons interviewed yesterday opposed Judge Hammill's plan" catches much more interest. It tells a reader forthwith whether his own views are those of the majority or of the minority, and everyone likes to say to himself, "I'm on the winning side" or "Can't these people see how they're being fooled?"

2. It must recount the news that provoked the symposium. With today's hasty reading, a mournful number of readers missed the story announcing the judge's new strictness, and others who saw it already have forgotten the details and recall it hazily as referring to drunken drivers or false fire-alarm ringers.

3. It must summarize the majority view and the bases upon which that view rests. Individual names almost certainly will not be used and probably individual quotations will be avoided.

4. It must summarize the minority view and the bases upon which that view rests. Here, too, names and quotes will be out of place.

These third and fourth duties are necessary to give readers a framework on which to fit the details that come later when the individual interviews are recounted. A lead for the Judge Hammill symposium would take this form, each duty being labeled numerically for easier analysis by the student:

(1) Two days in jail is too harsh a penalty for breaking the parking laws. This was the view of five out of seven persons questioned yesterday about (2) the announcement by Judge E. A. Hammill of municipal court that he plans to send errant parkers to jail instead of fining them the customary two dollars.

(2—*continued*) Judge Hammill in his announcement Monday said that fines were ineffective and that the city's traffic problem was growing so much worse that stern action was imperative.

(3) Those opposing Judge Hammill's plan agreed that it was too severe. Some declared that it would be ineffective, in that motorists who would plead guilty if a fine were the penalty now would devise ingenious and elaborate excuses which would compel the judge to exempt them.

One man said that the police would ignore all but the most flagrant violations, because they would dislike to be the cause of

sending motorists to jail for relatively trivial offenses. Another view was that the system would provoke disrespect for law.

(4) Those favoring the judge's plan argued that drivers now are treated too leniently and need to be jacked up, and that realization that jail awaits offenders will frighten drivers into observing the law.

The reporter has three ways of handling the individual interviews. Whatever method he adopts he should use universally, with each interview receiving the same grammatical treatment. An obvious structure is wanted in order that readers may know at once where one interview ends and the next begins. The three ways are:

1. The name, followed by identification and a sentence or a brief quoted paragraph, as:

Henry Wade, 807 Westlawn Street, truck driver for the Railway Express Agency—It'll be like going back to the old days when they hanged a man for stealing a loaf of bread. Too harsh; it won't work.

William Enderby, 110 Crescent Road, taxi driver—Everybody will have a good, strong excuse. The judge won't send a fellow to jail when he says he ran out of gas and was waiting for the garage to bring him a couple of gallons.

This is an excellent method, since it gives maximum emphasis to the break from one interview to the next and is almost impossible to misread. Whether the quotations are or aren't enclosed in quotes depends upon the paper's style sheet.

2. The quotation, split by the interviewee's name and identification:

"People will resent such drastic penalties for such mild offenses," declared Miss Mildred Marsh, 616 Farwell Avenue, teacher of English at Garfield High School. "Respect for law and authority will decline."

"What cop's going to hand a man a ticket that means two days behind the bars just because he was 12 feet instead of 15 feet from a fire hydrant?" asked Henry Savoy, 219 Oakridge Street, life insurance salesman. "The cops will have a heart, even if the judge hasn't."

This device has the advantage of bringing a strong quotation to the very front of a paragraph, but it blocks off the interviews less completely and accordingly is dangerous for a paper whose linotype operators may be careless about opening and closing quote marks.

3. A summary, followed by the name, identification, and a direct quotation:

Motorists are treated far too leniently, asserted William Buckmeister, 1909 Glen Arden Street, who does not drive a car.

"Why the law should be set aside for a man because he drives an automobile is something I cannot see," Mr. Buckmeister explained. "These auto drivers get away with murder; it's time someone cracked down on them."

A few doses of heavy punishment will make motorists afraid to break the law, Harvey Osborne, 772 South Street, traveling salesman, contended.

"I'm on the road six days a week," he said. "I see a lot of bad driving and it all comes from the fact that people aren't scared. What's a two or three dollar fine? If they know it means going to jail, they'll think twice before they get frisky."

This way often is the best when long quotations must be presented. The recurrence of paraphrase paragraphs is a clear break between the interviews.

Parallel syntax for all interviews is the keynote. Any mixing of methods hashes the symposium, because a reader does not know what is coming next and is so busy fathoming the story's lack of structure that he has little attention left for the substance of the interviews. Thus:

"Nix," said David Weymouth, 1264 Sheridan Street. "There isn't a cop in the city who would hand out tickets if it means two days in jail." Mr. Weymouth is a taxicab driver.

Franklin Janess, driver for the Gladstone department store, of 882 Middleton Road—I try to park right, but sometimes I can't do it. What chance have I got with half of every block marked off, "No Parking"?

That she would not come to this city to do her shopping was the comment of Mrs. Susan Laird, West Drewry.

"Sometimes I stay in a store longer than I mean to," she explained. "If I'm in danger of going to prison for it, I'll go over to Junctionville where they don't do such things."

This cowpath structure will confuse any but the most diligent reader. Purported symposia of this sort were a principal reason why the group interview went out of fashion. Restoring it to favor demands nothing more than alertness and planning. Any careful reporter can do a symposium. It is a fine way to show the city editor that his new staff member is worth fostering and promoting.

To recapitulate, interviewing is a newspaper necessity, and superlative interviewing comes only when a reporter can put himself into the place of the person being questioned and thereby see how to handle that person in order to get the most meaningful and interesting quotations.

Ed L. Keen of United Press is known throughout newsdom for his ability to get people to talk to him. "Why is that fellow making so much more money than I am?" more than one reporter has asked. "I can use words as well as he can." Yes, perhaps better, but can the complaining one induce people to talk as freely as can the top-money reporter?

The reporter who comes to know people of all degrees and in all corners of the city can present this week Colonel Farraday's views on the proposed anti-picketing law, next week Laundryman Chi Lin's comment on the Chinese famine, and the week after Garage Mechanic Bill Purvey's advice on how to start a car that stood outdoors throughout a ten below zero night. Give the city editor good interviews and he will use them. Also, he will remember who furnished the sparkling stories.

CLUBS AND LODGES

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## NEGLECTED NEWS

FRANK'S CAR is in the garage, having its "bronchitis" cured by a valve grinding. Tonight he is taking the bus from the movie theater to his lodgings. Sprawled comfortably in a far-back seat, he watches the other passengers. Only one seems interesting: a tall man in the gorgeous gaudiness of a lodge uniform. He has a cocked hat with a purple plume; his chest glistens with red and blue medals; his hands are folded over the hilt of a sword cased in a gleaming scabbard.

As he hurries to the door when the bus reaches his corner, the emblazoned man almost trips over his sword. Frank smiles loftily. "Second childhood hits some of them awfully early," he thinks.

But that two-legged spectrum, bound homeward from the lodge where for three-quarters of an hour he has been Magnificent Potentate or Exalted Eminent, offers Frank a chance to show something to the city editor. Once in a while the paper carries a bit about the Masons presenting a medal to a man fifty years a member of the order, about the Knights of Columbus electing officers, or about the Odd Fellows refurnishing the lodge rooms. These stories are so infrequent that weeks or months may separate them.

Here is Frank, chafing because after six months on the paper he is without a regular beat. He attends Parent-Teacher Association meetings and asks wholesalers whether Thanksgiving turkeys will cost more this year. "General assignments" are his diet, and they seem to offer no chance to cultivate some one news



field so intensively that he becomes a specialist reporter, an authority. The senior staffers all are discouragingly young and in abominably fine health. It looks like a long winter before he can cover a beat, unless . . . remote chance . . . he invents one.

Leaving the bus, Frank stops at the lunchroom for a nightcap snack. A substitute counterman is on duty. "Where's Slim?" Frank asks.

"Off joinin' the lodge. Fraternal Society of Beavers—my lodge."

"Crackers and milk," Frank orders.

"Biggest class our lodge ever had," the counterman goes on, as he reaches for a bowl and a packet of soda biscuits. "Yes, sir, seventy-eight fellows got initiated tonight. I'd have gone to watch them, but I had to take Slim's place here. Seventy-eight, that's a lot of new members."

It is, and an idea ignites in Frank's brain. "Who's the head of your lodge?" he asks.

Next morning, a five-minute telephone call, a trip to the store where the lodge leader works, and Frank has the full story, with the list of initiates. "I ran into this by accident," he tells the city editor.

He is surprised that the story is printed without cutting.

If he wishes to "invent a beat," here is his chance. He must do it largely on his own time. He will develop club and lodge news until the city editor is confident that its volume is so steady that it justifies being a regular, though part-time, beat and eases Frank's other duties to let him do the lodges more thoroughly.

In relatively few cities are clubs and lodges covered industriously, for all that their memberships include thousands of readers. The lodge beat, of some importance before manpower shortage during the First World War forced its abandonment, remained abandoned. One reason was that the young reporters assigned to it were too full of World Problems to see much news in the election of a new recording secretary. They covered lodge news lackadaisically, and the city editor forgot the lodge run in the pressure of the Tempestuous Twenties. "We ought to build up that run again," he reminded himself time and again, but

there was too much other news, exciting news. "Next time we take on a new man, we'll revive the lodge beat."

The next new man was too conscious of Significant Developments. He tried one telephone call, got the busy signal, and told the city editor, "I can't make that fellow for the Elks story. I'll try tomorrow." Tomorrow both he and the city editor forgot about it, because of a sizzling prohibition-law story.

The lodge beat today is only a memory in many cities. Here and there it has been redeveloped, and profitably. In the other towns it offers Frank a splendid opportunity.

#### PEOPLE WILL READ EAGERLY

Inherently, lodge news is worth while, because so many readers take part in lodge affairs. People, in the aggregate, are clannish. They enjoy dividing into groups, more or less rival groups. They are loyal, and relish membership in an institution to which they can demonstrate that loyalty.

Furthermore, the club or lodge is the only active institution that gives many adults a "good time," a chance to escape from the humdrum of making a living. This is the point that young reporters do not appreciate. Freshly graduated, they still have some of their college connections, such as fraternities and returning to see the football and baseball games. They are new enough in their jobs that their daily work is high in excitement and glamor.

As they grow older and take on more responsibilities, and as they wear into their jobs, daily life levels off and becomes more and more the same day after day. Eventually they feel an urge they did not have before, an urge for relief, relaxation, and excitement.

Often they cannot get that relaxation by themselves. A few years earlier, a chap might have decided at 7:30 p.m. to drive eighty miles to a larger city to have a wider choice of movies. If he did not return until 1:45 a.m., it made no difference save that he was a trifle yawny at breakfast. Now that chap is married and lives in a house rather than a hotel or a Y.M.C.A. room. Being away until 1:45 may mean an absence long enough for the furnace fire to sneak out or may be entirely impossible unless someone can be found on a moment's notice to tend the baby.

So these slightly older folk join lodges and clubs, where they can have entertainment without loss of time and where they can take part in vivid ceremonials. To a fellow of twenty-one or two a lodge ritual may seem gushy; to a man of thirty-five or forty, it is an escape. All day he frets at a monotonous job where he is an almost unnoticed wheel in a large set of gears; at lodge ceremony he is Illustrious Sir and when he lifts his hand, everyone rises. Momentarily, he is a man of importance.

This world of make-believe may be naïve, but it is satisfying. The thousands who live in it for an hour or two each week gladly will read about it if the paper gives them a chance. Frank must not underestimate their numbers. The Knights of Pythias, of whom there may be only a few, spend \$1,100 to air-condition the lodge home; Elks, Knights of Columbus, Red Men, Masons, and Moose, who cumulatively are many, are almost as interested in the story as are the Pythians. Frank is highly wrong if his reasoning is, "Pythians, 110; readers, 110." His arithmetic should be, "Pythians, 110; readers, 1,100, or even more."

Even the casual reader who never joined a lodge has a mild predilection for lodge news, because he likes to know what his friends and neighbors, who are members, are doing. If the story is well written, he is likely to read at least part of it. Thus Frank has a large reader group for his lodge and club news.

That this analysis is sound is evidenced by almost every paper in the country. The American Legion, almost as much a lodge as the K. of C. or the Masons, receives generous space, not because its members are so much more numerous than those of some other lodge, but because they make so much more noise—with their parades, drum corps, and other shiny activities—that the newspaper and the public continually are aware of the Legion.

#### NAMES ARE NEWS

What shall Frank look for in resuscitating the lodge run? First, he looks for names. Little of this news is exciting, but much of it is loaded with names, thereby offering many readers a chance to see themselves mentioned in the paper.

The committee members in charge of the Elks' clambake deserve to have their names printed. Harry Freeman is on the

kitchen committee and half a dozen of his neighbors get a chuckle as they picture Harry bending over a dishpan and scrubbing plates.

Next, Frank looks for a feature to put in the first line to attract the casual readers. This fortification of soft-voiced stories will be one of his best devices in getting readers to look for lodge news and to talk about it. Some of this talk drifts back to the city editor who knows thereby how much or little Frank's work is impressing readers.

Frank explains an event in terms that cut across the casual reader's lines of interest, to let him see that the Elks are doing things similar to those he himself does or would like to do. The Elks pay off and burn the mortgage on their home. Frank doesn't open his story with, "The Elks have paid the last \$900. . . ." Instead, he starts it, "The mortgage won't worry the Elks any more," because that method will interest so many casual readers who are worrying about their own mortgages. Lodge members will read the story regardless of its phrasing; the casuals follow it only if it is in their own language.

High among the "bewarees" is that of avoiding generalizations and other hard-to-visualize phrasings, especially if they seem to boost or puff the lodge. "A busy winter season has been planned by the local aerie of Eagles" is the poorest possible lead. Readers will judge at once that "the fellow who wrote that must be an Eagle" and will desert the story because they aren't interested in a free ad for the lodge.

Frank avoids such a reaction by changing generalizations into specific statements. He tells in what respect the Eagles have arranged a busy winter season.

#### LEARN THE LANGUAGE

However overornate Frank regards lodge nomenclature, he learns it thoroughly, because a mistake kills the story for all lodge members. It is a confession that Frank is a bungler rather than an expert. The Odd Fellows have an officer known as the right supporter to the noble grand. If Frank terms that officer the right "assistant," every Odd Fellow in town realizes that the story was written by someone who knew little about the lodge. If

he calls the head of a Masonic Blue Lodge the "grand" instead of the "worshipful" master, every Mason knows that the story was done by a half-informed outsider.

Frank avoids judging the value of a story by the size of the club or lodge. Some of the smaller organizations are among the most active. Careful as a tightrope walker, he avoids the slightest suggestion of partiality. If this week he gives the Odd Fellows' election of officers half a column and next week cuts the Red Men's election to two inches, he makes many enemies. He is eternally scrupulous against any semblance of favoritism between groups with a religious or a semireligious background. The Masons and the Knights of Columbus have a sincerely grand time at their annual bowling contest but if the K. of C. stories invariably are written at twice the length of Masonic news, Frank's city editor will hear some complaints.

The service clubs, such as Rotary, Kiwanis, and Lions, may be cared for already, so that Frank need not attend to them. If they are not followed regularly, he adds them to the list. He is alert to notice how a club may be increasing its influence. A few years ago the rod and gun clubs were dead or sinking rapidly. Then someone started the game of skeet, which made trapshooting interesting, and the rod and gun club returned to life. Now it has a waiting list for membership.

The "specialty clubs" such as stamp collectors' and camera clubs merit thorough attention. Their members are enthusiasts. The Odd Fellow has an active interest in his lodge, but the camera clubber is aflame with zeal. Give him stories of his beloved club and he regards the paper as the world's best, for all that the telegraph editor lost the story about the adjournment of the state legislature. Every city has specialty clubs. Addicts of the ancient game of curling may not be numerous, but if a community has enough of them to form a club, that club will be one of the most loyally supported organizations in town.

Finally, Frank under no circumstances makes fun of the clubs and lodges. Their members regard them too affectionately. Now and then a lodge runs a public meeting at which it presents certain of its ceremony. To Frank it seems rococo. He enjoys himself by writing with mild sarcasm that the gold-striped trousers

of the Inscrutable Omniscient needed pressing, and every member of the lodge is angry at the paper for months. Strangely, Frank recalls his college fraternity ceremonies as "impressive." He forgets the age differential; up to about twenty, ceremony is welcome, from twenty to thirty or thereabouts it is "slushy," and from thirty on it again is impressive.

### STAKING OUT THE FIELD

Cultivating the lodges and clubs has two problems. The first is finding out which organizations his city offers. The city directory helps him, but its "Associations, Clubs, and Societies" section is incomplete. Issue after issue, it overlooks the Saharan Camels, and it never has heard of the Philatelic and Numismatic Club. Digging out the full list of organizations is Frank's task and the more he comes to know the membership of the "standard" groups the sooner he learns of the specialized and smaller groups, for the memberships often are somewhat overlapping.

Much the harder work is devising a system whereby he can find out quickly what each group is doing. Daily or even weekly contact with each organization takes too much time, particularly since at the start the lodge beat is in addition to Frank's assigned work. His method is to cultivate a good acquaintance with someone, usually an officer, in each organization. The someone, once he sees that Frank's interest is sincere and abiding rather than transient, will tip him to whatever is about to happen. To foster that good acquaintance, Frank calls on lodge officers as regularly as possible, so that they come to know him and have confidence in him.

Whether Frank wishes to do anything with women's organizations depends upon the society editor. Long ago she may have perfected a coverage of the sisterhoods, and consequently she may view Frank as a poacher.

To emphasize the lodge news, Frank aims at a regular department or column, appearing once or twice a week under a sizable standing headline. Into this he tosses the lodge trivia too thin to be presented prominently on a day when the department isn't appearing. Two sentences about the new gas range in the Red Men's kitchen would be lost in the Thursday paper, but on Friday

it will be readable when it appears as part of the lodge column. Spot news, such as elections, he runs whenever it breaks. The K. of C. announcement on Monday of a building committee to arrange for a new lodge home cannot wait until Friday merely to be run in the lodge column, but the fact that Dennis Shea, now of Toronto, has been boosted to manager of his company's branch office can wait for the column.

Frank provides one or two strong stories so that the column will be more than personal jottings. His supply of these better stories is unfailing, for many good items are not so timely that they must run immediately. That the Moose have set the date for their annual minstrel show will embellish into a nice little story, as Frank recounts the history of the lodge shows, and it can be saved until column day.

The bulk of the lodge news will be social, about clambakes, dances, bridge tournaments, and bowling parties. To help in following such lodge business and ritualistic affairs as can become public, Frank learns what time of year each lodge elects officers and has its birthday celebration. Using a future book, he automatically catches these recurrent stories. Information about initiations, visits of national or international lodge officers, and special business he obtains from his contacts.

A year slides by. One day the People's Forum department on the editorial page prints a letter from the Fraternal Society of Beavers, thanking the paper for its excellent account of the lodge's observance of its fiftieth anniversary. The cub congratulates Frank and adds, longingly, "I wish I had a regular beat."

It wasn't very long ago that Frank, too, wished the same thing.

### CIVIC CLUBS

If the envious cub uses his head, he can take over as his own specialty a branch of club reporting that Frank won't touch: the community civic club. "Humph, the village improvement society?" Exactly, and it is a worthy specialty.

Each city has several organizations which combine community social consciousness with district development. Generally these clubs center in the outlying sections, near the city line, where a "village" is growing up. The "village" is part of the city, but

its residents are more conscious of their relationship to their little neighborhood than to the city as a whole.

Here is Eden Park, on the North Side, a sandy little hamlet where the back yards must be loamed before the householders can grow tomatoes. The Eden Parkers have asked the city government for a kindergarten, for street paving, and for more fire-alarm boxes, but their requests are granted with exasperating slowness. Finally the Eden Park Civic League was formed to be spokesman for the settlement and to make the city aware that Eden Park thinks it doesn't get its share of municipal services. Over on the East Side is the Pine Point Community Club, an outgrowth of the only partly successful clamor for better bus service. In general the Pine Pointers now believe that the city treats them fairly, but the club continues because it has fostered so much village solidarity that it now is almost as much a social organization as it is a village-development body.

Many American cities are collections of villages that amalgamated gradually as they discovered that their tax dollars went farther if there was only one large fire department rather than eight or nine little departments, and a single large school system instead of eight or nine small systems. The villages retain their self-consciousness for decades and a resident speaks of himself as living in Crawfordville rather than in "the city," though Crawfordville became part of Ward 5 some thirty years ago.

Many papers report these civic clubs generously, though haphazardly. The meetings are in the evening, most of them are in the more distant parts of town, and the afternoon paper's city editor passes them around so that every reporter shares in them instead of having one person do all these unwelcome assignments that mean quite a bit of time taken in travel. As a result, the reporter going to the Eden Park Civic League meeting has a sketchy background on which to build his story. He doesn't know enough of the village's history and ambitions. He writes a good spot story but it isn't an expert's story.

The cub will draw one of these village improvement league assignments. If he does it well, and says he liked it and wouldn't mind another, he will be accommodated. Before long he can be



the "village specialist," with his on-duty hours changed so that the evening assignments do not give him an overlong workday.

Tonight the cub has drawn the Eden Parkers' meeting in Norton's Hall. The first floor of the two-story building houses a grocery, a barber shop, and a cobbler's store. Above is the hall, with a stamped-metal ceiling and rows of folding seats with fiber backs and squeaky joints. Up front are a table and three or four chairs donated from various *hausfrau* kitchens. Andy, the cub, arrives half an hour early, not from ambition but because Eden Park wasn't as hard to find as he had expected. Three or four men chat idly. One of them, Andy discovers, is the civic league secretary.

"Tell me what the meeting is all about," Andy asks.

"Well, our committee went to see the mayor on Monday to find out about the kindergarten, and they're reporting back on what he told them."

"Thanks, that'll help me a lot."

When the meeting starts, Andy sits beside a friendly man who can identify the various speakers. The chairman calls them "Herman" and "Pete" and "Tubby," pleasantly familiar but wholly inadequate for Andy's purposes. "Who's that fellow?" Andy asks when a florid man finishes an argument that, "We have to work through the city council; the school board won't do anything for us." Andy's informant whispers, "He's Fred Lucas—works in the city, at the Forbes department store. Lives on Greenfield Street." When the meeting is done, Andy resorts to the city directory to complete these identifications and discovers that the speaker was Fredric, not Frederick, Lucas, 88 Greenfield Street.

Andy writes a quarter of a column, although he has notes enough for a column. He made a mistake there. To general readers the story may be of mild concern—"Aren't those Eden Parkers ever satisfied?"—but to the "villagers" it is of resounding interest. Because it does mean so much to them, Andy should give it as generous space as the city editor will permit. Because they, too, are villagers, the Pine Pointers, the Knotts Hill folk, and the Elmwood readers will follow the Eden Park story, if

only to assure themselves that the Park isn't getting more from the city government than is their own village. Thus the Eden Park story has a group of "automatic" readers much larger than the Park's own population. Moreover, a longer writing gives Andy elbow room in which to make the story inviting to "in-town" readers who don't appreciate that the city has a "suburban problem" of real importance and interest. If Andy judges the story's potential worth by the fact that the Eden Park meeting was attended by only sixty-one persons, he is far off the track.

### STRESS THE BACKGROUND

The story should include as much background as needed, not only to make it clear but to show how genuine the issue is in Eden Park. It should treat the Park as part of the city rather than as an isolated community. Compare these leads:

A new committee was appointed last night at a meeting of the Eden Park Civic League in Norton's Hall, Illinois Avenue, to continue agitation for a kindergarten. The action followed the report of a committee which interviewed Mayor William A. Sanderson on Monday and quoted him as "sympathetic" but "unable to do anything."

This routine lead gives no slightest indication that a kindergarten is a live and lusty issue. It is too matter of fact to attract any but already interested readers.

Eden Park residents won't take "No" for an answer.

Because they won't, the Eden Park Civic League meeting last night at Norton's Hall, Illinois Avenue, appointed a new committee to continue the Park's requests for a kindergarten in the McKinley School. The new committee is to arrange for deputations to tell both the school board and the city council how much the Park wants that kindergarten.

The action followed the report of a committee which interviewed Mayor William A. Sanderson on Monday and last night quoted him as "sympathetic" but "unable to do anything."

This lead makes it plain that the Eden Parkers mean business. Go on with the story, looking now at the background presented in the first or "a new committee" story:

The civic league has been active for three years in working for a kindergarten in the McKinley School, which now cares for pupils from the first through the ninth grade.

Andy asked two questions to get this information. It suggests that the Eden Parkers are aroused but does so altogether too faintly. Had Andy asked a few more questions, he could have written this background:

The civic league began asking for a kindergarten three years ago. At that time the McKinley School, caring for Grades 1 through 9, had 154 pupils. Its enrolment now is 228, Jasper McKeown, civic league secretary, said last night, and a kindergarten grade would have at least 25 children.

The league's first action was to present a petition, signed by 96 residents, to the school board, which said that it had no funds for another kindergarten. Two years ago the league asked both Ward 6 candidates for alderman to pledge themselves to work for a McKinley kindergarten. Frank Hosmer, Republican, did so but Thomas Downes, Democrat, said that he would "if conditions warranted." The league urged Hosmer's election and campaigned actively for him. He won by 203 votes, although Ward 6 normally is Democrat.

Last year the league had members write individually to the school board, which sent a spokesman to tell a civic league meeting that "It's all up to the mayor and city council. They control the funds."

Activity this year was aimed first at the mayor, who was visited Monday by a committee.

This takes space, but is worth it, for it shows the tenacity of the Eden Parkers. Such specific and detailed background cannot be gathered by a reporter whose attitude is, "Hick stuff; when do they start dancing the Virginia reel?"

Andy is not to present the Eden Parkers as a neglected and downtrodden group, unless actually they are. Yet the overzealous chronicler errs no more than does the overcompressed story, which suggests that the issue is utterly trivial and inconsequential.

#### THEY'RE IN THE CITY, TOO

Treating the civic league too much apart from the city as a whole results in a story starting in this fashion:

The Pine Point Community Club last night voted to ask for better police protection, after a meeting at Alexander Hall was told that there have been four house and two store burglaries within the last six weeks.

"Pine Point," muses a midtown reader, "oh yes, that settlement out east. Beyond the city limits, isn't it? Well, if they want to live out in the sticks, they've got to expect things like that." And he turns to the next column.

If Andy relates Pine Point to the rest of the city, he gets such a start-off as this:

Pine Point has the highest "crime ratio" of any part of the city, the Pine Point Community Club was told last night, when it voted at a meeting in Alexander Hall to petition Police Chief Daniel W. Reardon for better protection.

The four house and two store burglaries within the last six weeks are due to the general knowledge that Pine Point gets less police attention than any other part of the city, Roger T. Harms, 211 Magnolia Street, told the meeting.

Recurrent references to Pine Point's relation to the city proper intensify the story by keeping it from being too local or isolated.

Andy will make his village stories better reading if he works direct quotations into them, for then they are stories of persons rather than impersonal, all-summary writings. The three-paragraph story has little room for quotes; introducing them almost automatically lengthens the story enough to let it be "human" rather than "statistical."

What Andy is aiming for is top-of-column headlines. When his stories wear the three-line, thirty-point heads they are of easy visibility. Headline writers are a strange breed, and make-up editors even queerer. Everlastingly suspicious and putting acid instead of cream into their coffee, the desk editors nonetheless are horribly naïve. If they see that Andy regards his stories as slim, they are likely to accept his judgment and scribble diminutive twelve-point headlines that will sink to the very bottom of the page and be eclipsed by the four-column ad from the Boston Store. If Andy writes at half-column length, they are momentarily dubious, but, as soon as they see that his chronicle isn't

full of padding, they again accept his judgment and pound out a thirty-pointer that rides high on the page.

At first, the copy editors think, "Pine Point Club really did something for a change." Later they begin to wonder why the club is supplying so much more news than ever it did before. Then they set aside their gruffness and say, "That Andy is a comer. We never used to get more than three paragraphs on the Pine Point Club, but Andy can go to any old meeting and pull out a half-column yarn and, Ripley or not, it's all good reading." Andy trains the copy desk to his own belief that the Pine Point and Eden Park Clubs are genuine news.

"Want to do these civic clubs regularly?" the city editor asks.

"I'd be glad to."

"They're yours, Andy. You've been doing a good job."

When a city editor talks that way, the outlook for a raise is distinctly good.

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# 18

## CRIME NEWS

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### A TERM THAT NEEDS DEFINING

“MOTHER AND I are sorry that you are on the police beat,” runs the letter from home. “We had hoped that you would be able to avoid the sensational side of newspaper reporting. It seems a pity that a man with a university training, capable of constructive affairs, should be wasted in writing up murders and scandal. Your Mother and I hope that you will be transferred to something better very soon. If it would not get you in bad with your city editor, I should be glad to write him a letter. . . .”

No letter, please, Father. It would distinctly get your son “in bad.” Moreover, you didn’t see the full picture of the police beat and of crime news.

“Crime news” is a phrase used as loosely as any politician’s preëlection promises. Rarely does anyone bother to nail it down. Time and time again head-shaking worriers lament that the papers are “too full of crime news.” What they mean is, “too full of murder, rape, assault, and manhunt news.” They do not realize that the country has about thirty homicides a day, and that it is an unusual paper that even mentions, let alone mentions in detail, more than three or four of the day’s harvest. A murder must be “outstanding” in some way if it is to be printed on a national or even regional scale. A “routine” killing commands thirty inches in the local paper, ten in the one in the next city nearby, not more than three inches, if any, in the other papers of the state, and elsewhere it has no space at all. To maintain its thirty inches in the home city after the first day, it must have developments. If

these are lacking, it shrinks within a week to about four paragraphs and within a fortnight it is not mentioned unless it is resuscitated by new actions and events.

Other crimes have an even more retiring presentation. Only when they impinge upon the dramatic, the unusual, or the significant are they recorded outside the city in which they happened.

Why, then, the outcry that the papers are so full of crime news? "Conscience" is part of the answer. The most bellows-lunged critics of the press are the best informed readers of crime stories; they know the complete and latest details of as many current murders as get into the paper. But they fear that their interest in such news is reprehensible, and so, human nature being what it is, they seek an explanation that does not besmirch them. They do not say, "I follow crime news because I enjoy doing it"; instead they shift the blame and proclaim, "The papers are so full of crime news that there's nothing else to read. Of course I am therefore familiar with the murders, and it's the newspapers' fault."

This is not to whitewash the newspapers. At the kindest, they have been derelict. They concentrate the crime news on the front page or on pages 2 and 3. The ratio of crime news on these pages to crime news farther back in the paper is enormously high. The papers put it "up front" for two reasons.

First, a crime story can flare at any moment into striking developments. This writer recalls a night when, as news editor, he put on the front page of the first edition a weak little story saying that two suspects in a western kidnap murder were "still in jail awaiting trial." The account had nothing with which to bid for page 1 prominence except that "something might happen." It did. In the second edition, printed an hour after the first, the story took the lead position and told how deputies were repulsing a lynch mob of several thousand persons who repeatedly were attacking the jail. In the third edition, fifty minutes later, the news described how the mob finally had battered down the jail door, seized the suspects, and had lynched them.

By keeping the apparently routine crime story on the first page, the news editor had it where he could get at it handily if it developed. Had he mired the first-edition story on page 14, he

would have had to wreck several pages in refashioning the paper in order to bring the story to the front page where the mob's action could be told in its proper emphasis. Any crime story may expand suddenly and dramatically; crime news therefore is put on pages easy to rebuild, and most of these pages are in the front of the paper. Undeniably, news and make-up editors overdo it; many a page 1 or page 2 crime chronicle could be sunk safely on page 16, an "away" page. Distributing rather than concentrating the crime news would reduce much of the criticism about the "sensational" press.

Research students have worn out their rulers and pencils measuring the amount of crime news and finding its ratio to the total space. For even a noisy and spectacular paper to run above four per cent of crime news is unusual, but because that news is so generally in the first few pages, it seems like forty or eighty per cent.

#### WHAT IS CRIME NEWS?

Then the defamers of the newspaper have not defined "crime news." Even their most zealous members would object to deleting all information that properly can be called "crime." A city's political boss, for years in unscrupulous and iron-fisted power, finally is sent to the penitentiary for the excesses of his misrule. Is this "crime" or "governmental" news? The Federal authorities announce new measures to combat foreign espionage in this country. Is this "crime" or "national defense" news? A dairy farmer is arrested for ignoring the state agriculture department's command that he sell milk at a stipulated price. Is this "crime" or "agricultural" news? A governor announces that a quiet investigation of the state banking commission reveals apparently criminal irregularities in liquidating banks that closed during the great depression. Is this "crime" or "financial" or "governmental" news? Much news involving violation of the law is so vitally valuable that the most rigorous reformer would insist that it be kept in the paper.

Something must be wrong, then, with the treatment of the murder-rape-assault-manhunt news that, despite its small quan-



tity, it stirs such protest. Something is wrong with it, and also something is wrong with the critics.

The critics are not aware of a change in the last few years that has come over the nation, and inexorably thereby has come over the press. For about sixteen years, the aftermath of the First World War and the impact of the liquor-prohibition amendment in the Federal Constitution combined to produce a fester on the country's public opinion. The nation, with wartime excitement still ringing in its ears, had a difficult time in settling down to the quiet of peace. The prohibition laws were evaded on an organized and international scale, as Americans freely patronized law-breakers who supplied them with illegal and sometimes poisonous liquor. The authorities, national, state, and local, were engulfed, and occasionally enmeshed, in the wave of lawbreaking. Fabulous profits in rum-running drew brainy men into the bootleg business. When someone was convicted, the public did not regard him as a criminal, but took the view that the law he broke had no business being on the books anyway. The criminal received sympathy, the officers received scorn.

The scorn was made more bitter because of the lengths to which some officers went in trying to enforce the liquor laws. When a community realized that its officers, in plain clothes and without easy identification, jumped out of the midnight darkness and shouted at motorists to stop and be searched, and then shot when the drivers thought them to be holdup men and stepped on the gas to escape, the public began speaking of "the damned cops." Every community knew who were its bootleggers and saw their flashy display of quickly gotten money. The bootlegger rode in a custom-built automobile; the policeman rode in a four-year old, second-hand car. The bootlegger ran through stop signs and nothing happened to him; the "ordinary citizen" snubbed a sign and was fined ten dollars. Rumors, sometimes supportable, of the link between underworld and police were spread by every wind. The prohibition laws in particular, and all law in general, became discredited.

The newspapers must share the blame for this situation, for all that they did not create it. They amplified it. The tabloids

finally had come over from England; managing editors thought readers were surfeited with "heavy" news of postwar reconstruction in Europe and governmental affairs at home and that "spicy" copy was needed to hold circulation. The bootleg era provided reams of spicy copy. The public saw the bootlegger as a modernized Robin Hood, glamorous, successful, powerful. The "courageous" criminal eluded the "dumb" police. If the criminal was unfortunate enough to be caught, he was regaled in human-interest stories that showed inevitably that at heart he wasn't such a bad fellow and that certainly he was dashing and romantic.

#### THE TIDE COMES IN

Then three things happened. First, the prohibition amendment was repealed and legal drinks returned. That cut the bootlegger out of his lush market. Second, the criminal, hunting new sources of money, turned to kidnaping. The public no longer could excuse lawbreaking on the ground that the law itself was a mistake. Third, the Federal officers, the G-men, received more power, more funds, more training. Changes in the law shifted various crimes from offenses against the state to offenses against the nation and a criminal no longer evaded capture simply by skipping across a state boundary. The law finally caught up with the criminal, and found him no dashing, romantic, glamorous figure but a cringing, cowardly rat. The public began to talk about "those smart cops." The human-interest stories changed; they told of the efficiency and tenacity of the new-era officers, and, when they did picture the criminal, they showed him as a weasel, seizing perhaps thousands of dollars but paying all of it to other crooks for protection, and as a coward ready to betray a comrade in order to improve his own chance of escape. The wave of kidnaping also had its effect, sharpened when the snatchers killed their victim and then continued ransom negotiations under the promise that he would be released as soon as the money was paid.

All these circumstances ended the low repute into which the law and its agents had slipped. The newspapers reflected the change in public opinion, but the critics had built a case against them that was damaging, even when allowance was made for the

way in which the critics overstated that case. Many of today's critics still talk about the crime news of 1928 or 1930 without realizing that crime news has changed.

### THE PRO AND THE CON

Crime news remains a form of information that can be of pinnacle social value or of abysmal social harm, depending upon how it is written. Rightly done, its values are several:

Crime news reveals the condition of the law-enforcing agencies, shows whether they are honest or corrupt, alert or sleepy, shrewd or stupid. Thus it gives the public a check on the quality of the forces upon which it depends for protection. Crime news is valuable in preventing injustice to the innocent, by maintaining the law's operations open and aboveboard and preventing star-chamber and undercover frameups that convict someone, regardless whether that someone is guilty. Crime news is at least a mild deterrent, particularly when the authorities are catching and convicting lawbreakers. Crime news proclaims the new methods of lawbreakers, thereby enabling the public to protect itself. When it does these things, crime news is of utmost value to the public.

When manhandled, crime news is sewer-poisonous. It can show how to commit crime successfully. It can give a false idea of the prevalence of crime and can suggest wrongly that the public accepts lawbreaking as ordinary and nothing to be taken seriously. It can build sympathy for the undeserving by glorifying criminals. It can help criminals by informing them of the police strategy. It can hamper justice by "trying cases out of court" and so warping a jury that an intelligent and courageous verdict is impossible. Finally, it can burn the law-abiding relatives of a criminal with a pitiless publicity. When it does these things, crime news is abhorrent.

### THE PERSONAL ASPECT

Much of the difficulty in handling crime news comes from the reporter's necessarily close contact with the police. The better reporter he is, the more officers he knows and the greater his familiarity with them. He spends hours each day or night at the

station, talking with the police, coming to know them not as instruments of government but as individuals. Some he finds to be wise, sympathetic, fearless, and loyal. Others he learns are stupid, brutal, shifty, and perhaps venal. He discovers that the amount of news he obtains from them depends whether they regard him as a "good fellow" or as an enemy.

Many officers are admirable in every way, and do a dangerous work for scanty pay. When someone is in true misfortune, the police often are the first to contribute to a donation, despite the fact that they cannot afford to do so. Before long the reporter sees every policeman as an actual rather than a potential hero and writes lionizingly. Whatever the officers do is right, and arrest becomes in his eyes automatically equivalent to conviction. He presents the police version of an arrest in enthusiastic detail, but what the accused may say in defense is ignored or submerged. He is trying cases out of court and influencing public opinion so vividly that if an accused person is acquitted the general reaction is, "He was so smart they couldn't pin it on him," rather than, "The police pulled the wrong man that time."

In one Eastern city, the reporters let the police explain every crime they could not solve as the work of "outside professionals," as if that justified failure to find out who was the criminal. A dozen or a score of times a year, the officers shook their heads and said, "It was the work of outside professionals," and the story at once dropped from the papers.

One reporter sees the police as working against crushing odds in their efforts to protect the community; another views them as stupid or even as lawless as the crime they are fighting. The truth, inevitably lies between the extremes; presenting that truth in perspective makes the police beat a responsible work.

### "TAKE POLICE TODAY, TOM"

Turn now to Tom Hastings, newly detailed to "do police." Yesterday he went to the station with the reporter who today is shifted to a new work. Today Tom is on his own. He knows little of police organization and must learn of it quickly. The public library can help him not at all, for the police system varies enormously from one city to another. In one an "inspector" is

midway between a lieutenant and a captain, and in another he outranks a captain. One city has a "detective bureau" and another has no separate sleuthing department. The nomenclature and operating methods must be learned for the individual community. Each police force subdivides according to the particular needs of the city. In one, there is a "traffic division," in another an "arson squad," and in a third a "railroad detail." Tom must learn quickly what the "specialties" are in his city.

Yet he need not be discouraged, for, though police organization is not standardized, its news channels rather are. He has, probably, six central sources of information:

1. "The blotter," where arrests are recorded, with the name and address of the person arrested and the charge against him. In most cities this record book is a public document and can be inspected freely. Tom discovers speedily that the blotter gives too scanty information for good stories. He must talk to the arresting officers, who sometimes are hard to locate at the moment he needs them.

From the blotter he obtains the chronicle of the day's routine and some of its high spots. In addition to listing arrests, the blotter usually carries assorted items, such as a report that a child is missing, that an automobile spare tire has been stolen, that a street light has gone dark, that a dog has been run over.

2. Traffic bureau. Many communities give traffic control the dignity of a separate division or subdivision in the police system. Traffic cases will be recorded on the bureau rather than the general blotter. In many cities, the traffic bureau keeps records of all accidents, rather than only those resulting in arrests. These records cannot be accepted as authentic, particularly in regard to the names and addresses of injured persons and the extent of their hurts. The police had to obtain information under unfavorable circumstances, for the persons in an accident often are too dazed, shocked, or injured to talk coherently. Accident reports written from the traffic blotter always require the verifying of names and addresses and the statements describing the mishap. This necessity is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

3. The detective bureau. This organization is as unstandardized as any element in the police system. In one city, it

handles only the investigation of somewhat serious crimes committed or threatened; in another it receives also the reports of \$1.45 thefts from backyard clotheslines—which in the first city would be entered on the general blotter.

From the detective bureau records the reporter obtains news skeletons rather than complete stories. That an arrest has been made will be recorded, but the sleuthing that led to it will not be detailed. To learn about it, the reporter must talk to the detectives. The bureau is a rendezvous, where information may be obtained by adroit listening and questioning, rather than a repository where official records can be transcribed into complete stories.

4. Other specialist divisions, varying with the city. Sometimes the arson squad keeps its own records, and sometimes it enters the arrests its members make upon the general or the detective bureau blotter. The reporter learns what are his city's specialties, which officers are in charge, what they do with their records. In other words, he learns the course of both officially recorded and of confidential information. Hearing that eighty cartons, each containing 10,000 cigarets, have been stolen from a freight car, he knows whether to go for details to the desk sergeant, the detective bureau lieutenant, or the railroad detail sergeant.

5. "Private spikes." In some cities, various officers have private records, not generally open to the public, but frequently accessible to the reporter. The detective bureau, as an instance, has its "alibi book" in which its members report what they have done this day and whether they are nearer or farther from an answer to their problems. "N. P.," meaning "Not for Publication," is marked against some items to warn the reporter that, though he may read their information, he is not to repeat it in his stories.

From this confidential information the reporter obtains the background of police actions, and thus learns far more about an arrest than is recorded on the desk sergeant's blotter. How freely he dare print material taken from the private spikes is entirely a matter of the practices of the individual police department. Sometimes the answer is, "You may print anything that isn't

marked 'N. P.,' " and other times it will be, "You may print only what we specifically permit; if you wish to make use of an entry, ask about it."

6. "Pipelines." The reporter cultivates various in-the-know officers, so that they will fill in the background for him when the officers directly concerned with a case cannot be reached. These confidantes also tip him to projected or in-process developments. "There'll be a raid tonight, at 123 Appletree Road. About 11 o'clock. Beer parlor selling hard liquor." Or, "Ask the detective captain about that Randall burglary. He's got a suspect in the goldfish room now."

Sometimes these informants act as emissaries when someone is being interrogated and the reporter must learn at once, to make an edition, what the line of questioning may be.

This pipeline information amplifies, explains, and clarifies the police action. It does not come to a new and untested reporter. Tom must show that he has discretion, that he knows how to tell a bit of background without revealing who gave it to him, that he can keep silent about a chunk of information until the right time to disclose it, that he is steady and intelligent. He cannot hope to do a thorough job until he has these unofficial but essential information sources working for him. To develop them, he views expediency as the only policy and may become so afraid of offending an officer that he is nothing but a police apologist. Maintaining the right to independent judgment without offending and thus drying up news sources calls for tact and diplomacy.

In a city of any size, Tom will be at the police station all day, because he never knows at what moment a lively story may break. He goes with the officers on some calls and on others he is content with the reports as they are presented by the officers after their investigations. One of his jobs is picking up things that happened while he was off duty. An afternoon-paper reporter, for example, must find out about news that happened during the night. Routine cases he takes from the blotter, from the reports turned in by the dog-watch officers, and from the detectives' reports. Some items demand extended treatment. To be able to present it, Tom trains the day desk officer to learn and give him the details of the nighttime episodes. Often these details

will be of adequate amplification, but other times Tom will hustle out and interview the persons concerned. If the city has police substations, Tom calls them at stated times and also trains the desk man at headquarters to pass on to him at once any interesting "breaks" coming from these outlying stations.

Tom extends his contacts to the state police barracks and the sheriff's office. From experience he learns how often to call and to visit these sources. He arranges for them to notify him of "anything hot." If they fail, his friends at headquarters pass on information that has come to them from the troopers and the sheriff. In brief, Tom learns how to read the department records, how to amplify their details, and establishes a series of contacts so that he is informed promptly of just happened events and is tipped to expected happenings. He cannot build this informational network in a week. That is why, if he makes a good start on police, Tom can expect to stay there some time.

#### TOM GROWS UP

In a metropolis, Tom Hastings will not be alone; he will be the rookie in a police-reporting corps of several members. In a fair-sized city he works alone and spends much more time at headquarters than at the newspaper office. In a tiny city, the police man may be part time and he drops in at the station two or three times a day to pick up the routine news. Between visits he relies upon his contacts to keep him informed by telephone if anything big breaks. Yet whatever the details of the job, he develops certain qualities from it.

First, he learns that accuracy is obtained only with constant vigilance. Officer Murphy, reporting an automobile accident, lists one driver as "Gerald Franklin, 1206 Meadow Street," and Tom, with perfunctory nonchalance verifying the name in the city directory, is jolted to learn that it should be "Gerald Shanklin."

Second, he learns that of the five *W*'s, the "why" always must be investigated with utmost thoroughness. Officer O'Connell, on traffic duty twelve years at Main and Third, is transferred to pounding a beat. It seems a routine shift, yet if the "why" is explored the story may lift on to page 1 when it shows politics



behind the transfer or discloses that the chief has instituted a new move-them-around policy and plans to reshuffle the entire force if the first two or three transfers work as he hopes.

Thus Tom becomes everlastingly suspicious. He is seeing the world at its worst, and many of the persons he watches have lively reason for making green seem like blue. Two cars have smashed. One driver mumbles, "I don't know how it happened," but the other begins calling Tom "old fellow" and "old man," and has a voluble explanation of everything connected with the accident. Plausible, too. Tom bites the first time or two and is discouraged to find that the fellow so glib in volunteering information wanted to keep him away from any inquiries that might reveal that the accident happened while the driver was returning from a notorious night club with another man's wife.

"That fellow's in the clear," Tom protests to the desk sergeant, after hearing a suspect explain why he couldn't possibly have committed the burglary. "His story stands up."

The sergeant nods. "Yeah, maybe so. He's a good talker anyway."

In court next day the man pleads guilty, and Tom is heartsick at his inability to judge human nature better. The suspiciousness he acquires on police will be forever useful to Tom and will lead him to investigate other news more thoroughly when he advances to another run.

Third, Tom learns to control this suspiciousness and keep it from making him a cynic, who always can find and does find a disparaging or discreditable motive for an action. If Tom becomes a cynic he concurrently becomes hard-boiled. From that time on, he can be described most accurately as "once a good reporter." He has lost the sensitiveness that makes him a keen judge of human nature, because all he can see is the bad in people.

Fourth, he learns resourcefulness and ingenuity, of which there are two kinds. One is the Hollywood sort, in which stealing photographs and impersonating an officer in order to browbeat the reluctant into talking are legitimate devices. This sort of skulduggery is nearly done with. The other resourcefulness is that of shrewd, clever thinking within the limits of honor and honesty. The reporter goes to a house to get information about a youth

charged with forging a check, and the boy's father slams the door in his face. The reporter scoots into a drugstore and calls by telephone. If the father remains adamant, he can hang up the receiver, but the chances are fair that he will talk, for all that he would not respond again to any amount of doorbell punching.

Something has happened, and the chief hasn't said even a syllable. The detective captain is equally a clam. Tom goes to the sheriff. "What's the big secret at police station?"

"I didn't know there was one, Tom."

"Well, there is. Nobody will say a word."

"I'll see if I can find out for you."

The sheriff manufactures a reason for dropping in at the station, gets the information, and relays it to Tom. Sometimes the police aren't as hushy as they seem. The detective captain, refusing to talk, adds loudly, "And don't go asking the sheriff to find out for you." Tom does not ignore this broad hint, and when he uses it to break the story he sees that, for political or other reasons, the police couldn't talk but were truly eager for the information to come out, so long as it is not accredited to them.

A whiskery dodge was for the reporter to announce, "I'm from headquarters," true enough in that he did come from there but falsely implying that he is of the police. Believing that they were talking to an officer, the family answered every question. The reporter never revealed himself, and the family wondered next day how the newspaper got its information. Is such subterfuge ever ethical?

The question is hard to answer, for the people involved in police news frequently are themselves highly unethical. Must a reporter "fight fire with fire," which means, of course, "lie when you're talking to liars"? The reporter is not a detective; his work is to report what the police have done, supplemented by what he learns from other sources. "What he learns from other sources" does not give him the powers of the Ogpu or the Gestapo. Because circumstances do not standardize, he can draw no copper-riveted line between what he will do and will not do. His best rule of thumb is that every possible ingenuity and resourcefulness is justified so long as he can hitch in front of it the adjectives "honest" or "honorable." The city editor who demands that a

reporter out-Sherlock the detectives and crawl through the sewer to do it is a poor executive to work for. He belongs in the museum with the other dinosaurs. The usual excuse for this sort of cheapness was, "If we don't do it, the competition will and we'll be scooped." The newer generation of city editors says, "Go the limit, but remember there is a limit."

Fifth, Tom learns to control his emotions. The first time he hears a sobbing wife tell how she killed the drunken husband who had knocked out half her teeth and tried to club her children, he is sick at heart. He must learn to control that sickness so that he can write an accurate and dispassionate story. Until he builds this control, he is forever in danger of an emotionalized story so inaccurate in facts or in interpretation that it does someone a great injustice.

Tom's training on police is to the good, if only he avoids cynicism. He may, and wisely, learn to *appear* cynical, but to *be* cynical is completely bad.

#### SUSPECTS

Tom quickly picks up certain distinctions. The first is that a person is not a "suspect" because he has been brought to headquarters for questioning. That happens to many persons against whom the police have not a shred of suspicion. Usually these persons are not named or otherwise identified in the stories. The chief exception will be for persons previously linked with the news. A payroll clerk has been robbed and is asked to go with the officers to the station to repeat his account of the holdup. He will tell his story again and will look at rogues'-gallery pictures in an attempt to identify the robbers. To suggest that the clerk is a suspect because he was questioned at headquarters is harshly unjust and entirely libelous.

When a person becomes legally a suspect, he is arrested on an "open charge," allowing the officers to hold him a specified time, usually twenty-four hours, during which they must either find justification for a definite accusation or must release him. Because the public does not understand the open charge, many newspapers do not give the names of persons so arrested. Many of them are released, because they demonstrate their innocence.

How many exceptions to make to this general rule varies with the individual office. The reporter learns the "office policy," rarely available in writing but fully as definite as if carved in granite.

Tom learns also that persons against whom no tinge of suspicion has arisen can be arrested as "material witnesses." The law allows persons who saw or otherwise have close knowledge of certain major crimes to be so detained, both for their own protection from those who might wish to keep them from testifying in court and to ensure that they do not "run out" and be unavailable when the case comes to trial. Though these witnesses are kept in jail, they are not prisoners and are not to be referred to as such.

If the police tell for whom they are searching, in vain so far, Tom probably omits that person's name until a warrant has been issued. The exceptions will be for persons of known and presumably habitual criminality. The awkward moment comes when the police announce that a warrant "will be issued." Office policy usually decides whether to use the name. If in doubt don't, for there is always the chance that the warrant may never be issued.

#### EXPLAINING CRIMINALS' METHODS

Tom worries about the theft story. Shall he tell what the robbers missed, thus inviting them to return for a second try? Sometimes what they missed is the best part of the story. The burglar who found ninety-eight pennies in a pewter water pitcher but overlooked \$231 under a stack of oranges in a fruit bowl will be eager for another try. Usually the situation smoothes out; the householder is so frightened that he takes the \$231 to the bank, thus allowing Tom to mention the burglar's bad luck and show at the same time that there is no use in his trying again.

Explaining the methods used in a crime calls for skillful phrasing, so that the information will be used by the public to protect itself against the same trick being worked again rather than by other criminals seeking to perfect their techniques. A householder leaves lights in living and dining rooms before he goes to the movies, but when he returns his home has been ransacked. The police catch the burglar, who explains that he knew the ordinary family would not have the dining room alight at

10:30 P.M. and therefore judged that the lights were a fake and the house was empty. This bit of reasoning might be most helpful to someone contemplating a housebreak and confident that he would be smarter than the thief who was caught. Tom handles the situation by a little questioning, which results in this addition to the story:

Detective Captain Daniel W. Dennis said that the burglary probably would not have happened if the lights had been left burning in a bedroom and in the bathroom, and the curtains of those rooms had been pulled down. Lights in these rooms at any hour of the evening are so natural, the captain said, that a burglar would hesitate to take a chance that they were fakes. Even if he telephoned and got no answer, he could not be sure, Captain Dennis added, because many families, about to retire, do not answer the telephone.

Tom avoids a description that intimates that the method is so successful that it can be used again:

The burglar cared for the Jamison dog, a loud barker, by putting anise seed in his trouser cuffs. Dogs like the anise smell and rarely molest anyone having it. That this was the burglar's method was indicated by a number of anise seeds which spilled from his trouser cuffs. Even hostile dogs can be made harmless by the anise-seed trick.

A few changes keep this information from being useful to other burglars:

The burglar cared for the Jamison dog, a loud barker, by putting certain materials whose smell attracts dogs in his trouser cuffs. That this was the burglar's method was indicated by a quantity of the material which had spilled out of the cuffs. Captain Dennis said today that, while this trick works sometimes, it is not at all certain and hence is little used by burglars.

The precautions adopted to prevent a repetition of the crime should not be exploited so glowingly that they challenge a conceited criminal:

An alarm system was being installed today. Supt. A. T. Rowe said that with it the cashier could sound alarms in all parts of the store simply by pressing a button under the cash drawer. A second button, on the floor, operates by foot, so that even if the cashier

were commanded to raise his hands he could give the alarm. With this new apparatus, the store is safe from such robberies as yesterday's, Mr. Rowe said.

Mr. Rowe and the reporter overdid it. A bandit would not have to be terrifically smart to figure that if lured a few feet out of position, the cashier would be unable to reach either alarm. Tom, accordingly, rewrites the paragraph:

An alarm system was being installed today. Supt. A. T. Rowe said that it would enable the cashier to sound alarms without making movements that would arouse a bandit's suspicions.

### THE POLICE VERSION

The hardest problem is handling police explanations of the reasons for an arrest. Without these explanations, which indicate the seriousness of the captures, the story is weak. That a supposed housebreaker had been caught means much less than that the supposed housebreaker is believed to be the one who has robbed twenty-six homes on the North Side in the last two months. Yet the police explanations, theorizings, and ramifications not only are without protection from libel if they are untrue but can be highly unjust.

The paper may print without fear of a lawsuit such news as is incorporated into an official public record. This news is a statement of the name of the person arrested, the charge on which he was seized, and the immediate disposition of his case—that is, whether he was released on bail or put in a cell until his appearance in court.

Henry Dean, 26, a truck driver, of 1101 Western Avenue, was arrested last night at 11 on a charge of breaking and entering in the nighttime. Patrolman Oscar Elwin made the arrest in front of the grocery store at 16 Euclid Street.

This official, documented information does not say or suggest that Dean is guilty. Now consider this:

Detective Captain Daniel W. Dennis said that Dean probably will be charged with burglaries at nine stores. Shortly before each robbery, a truck was parked in front of the store. To any passerby who seemed curious the driver explained that he had had a break-

down and had just arrived, hours late. He was carrying his cartons to the back door, he said, so that they would be out of sight during the night.

When the pedestrian had gone, Captain Dennis said, the bandit forced the rear door of the store and took what he wanted. At one grocery store he took more than \$400 worth of canned goods.

Although no one noticed the number plates of the truck, several persons were able to recall its general appearance. No two agreed on the name painted on the truck. This suggested to the police that a new name was painted on before each burglary, Captain Dennis said, and all officers were ordered to watch for a truck of a certain make, with its name in much newer paint than that on the rest of the body.

Patrolman Elwin saw the truck he believed to be the suspected one stop in front of the Euclid Street store a little after 11 o'clock. Seeing him approach, the driver jumped into the truck and was about to drive away, but Elwin pulled his gun and the man stopped.

Dissatisfied with the driver's explanation that he had come to the store to pick up a package of food that was to be left for him at the back door, Elwin took Dean to the station.

Dean insisted that he had telephoned to the storekeeper, Henry Grise, that he would be delayed and asked to have some groceries left where he could find them. Motor trouble kept him from coming until very late, he declared.

Dean said he had recently repainted the name on the truck because the original lettering had streaked and faded. He declared that, if the paint were scraped off, the officers would see that there had been but one repainting rather than the several necessary to fit their explanation. He volunteered to scrape the paint but was not allowed to do so.

The storekeeper could not be reached last night or this morning.

Regardless of its legal status, this material, valuable in showing that the police attach some importance to the arrest, is lopsided. Its connotation is that Dean is the burglar. Yet his explanation may be true. His friends and neighbors are not to be so convinced by the newspaper of his guilt that they will regard justice as indeed blind if the court acquits him.

The entire trouble is that the story structure is slanted. It presents all of the police argument before it mentions that of the accused. The headline writer builds his headline on the top of the story; inevitably the police version will monopolize it. Many

readers will not follow to the end of the story and thus will miss Truck Driver Dean's explanation. Those who do not read every word will be so convinced of the police case by the time they reach Dean's account that they will reject his statements as obviously hollow. If the police have blundered, Dean goes home to a neighborhood of whispers and insinuations that "he was too slippery; they couldn't stick it on him."

### THE TECHNIQUE OF FAIRNESS

All this can be avoided, without in the slightest intimating that the police views are mistaken, by altering the story structure so that the accused's version, however shorter, is presented as prominently as the police account. The structure is:

Block 1: Name of person arrested, statement of charge against him.

Block 2: Circumstances of arrest, if newsworthy; the "how" and "where."

Block 3: Summary, usually one paragraph, of the police version.

Block 4: Summary, usually one paragraph, of the person's defense.

Block 5: Expansion of Block 3.

Block 6: Expansion of Block 4.

The proximity of the two summary paragraphs, Blocks 3 and 4, tells a reader early in the story that there is a defense argument. The defense summary is near enough the top that the headline writer can use it without breaking the rules of his craft, which outlaw writing a head from the bottom of a story. Even if Block 5, the detailing of the police view, runs for twelve paragraphs, the reader already has learned that there is another side to the episode and is more likely to withhold judgment until he finishes the story. Thus he comes upon the details of the defense statement with something approaching an open mind. If he drops the story before reaching Block 6, he has had Block 3 to tell him in compact form that the defense does have something to say. Thrown into this structure, the story starts in this fashion:



(Block 1)

Henry Dean, 26, a truck driver, of 1101 Western Avenue, was arrested last night at 11 on a charge of breaking and entering in the nighttime. Patrolman Oscar Elwin made the arrest in front of the grocery store at 16 Euclid Street.

(Block 2)

Detective Captain Daniel W. Dennis said that Dean probably will be charged with burglaries at nine stores.

(Block 3)

The apparent likeness of Dean's truck to one used in the series of robberies led to the arrest, Captain Dennis said. The police were looking for a truck with its name in much newer paint than that of the rest of the body, and Dean's truck answered this description, the captain said.

(Block 4)

Dean said that he had repainted the name on his truck recently because the original lettering had faded and streaked. He said he was at the store to pick up a package of food he had asked earlier by telephone be left at the back door, where he could find it when he came after the store had closed.

The desire for fairness will keep Tom Hastings careful about a crime victim's statements as to his assailant. The victim may be intensely confident that he knows "who did it," but his sureness may be mistaken. Tom will not name the person the victim mentions until a warrant is taken out, unless that person already is on the "wanted" list and this crime, if indeed done by him, is merely another in a series.

### THE THIRD DEGREE

Few reporters have found a satisfactory way of dealing with the "third degree," the prolonged, illegal, and sometimes torturous questioning of a suspect by the police. Hammered with questions and sometimes with a rubber hose, which leaves few if any marks, only a durable suspect can hold out for twenty-four or thirty hours. Suspects sometimes are kept incommunicado and are denied an attorney's assistance. In some cities these practices are common, and in many they are done at least occasionally. They are as much outside the law as is highway robbery. Yet they have been tolerated and even accepted on the theory that "hard" criminals can be "broken" in no other manner.

The general belief is that only confirmed criminals are so treated, but the facts sometimes are otherwise. Various cities have shabby reputations because of the brutality of their police.

If the reporter inveighs against this, he risks police reprisal in closing his contacts, thus restricting him to the meager pickings from the blotter. He is likely to be assailed by at least part of the public as "obstructing justice" and "taking the criminal's side." If he keeps silent, he sees the strong-arm method substituted for brainwork, and, sooner or later, will see instances he is convinced are miscarriages of justice.

An individual and isolated decision of policy is difficult; it is better to wait until a clear-cut instance comes and then talk it over with the managing editor, whose greater experience and maturity may suggest a better treatment of the case than the reporter would devise unaided. Certainly, however, the casualness with which some police reporters refer to the "grillings" is questionable. The problem is one of the hardest.

As a matter of both justice and caution, Tom Hastings refers to confessions as "purported" until he himself has seen them and knows the circumstances under which they were obtained. More than one confession obtained by coercion has been successfully overthrown in court.

### HUMOR IS RISKY

Humor and inferences are always dangerous. Police news by its very nature is anything but funny, and unless the humor is applied carefully, it will ridicule the law and its enforcement or will damage individuals.

Policeman Charles Retson heard a noise last night as he was passing the Schiber department store on North Street. It came from within the store and sounded as if someone were hammering.

Retson is new on the force, and looking for fame and promotion. Hammering inside a department store at 3:30 in the morning was very, very suspicious. Retson went to the delivery alley and, sure enough, there stood a truck, without lights. Retson knew now what was happening. Bandits were about to make way with a couple of grand pianos, a showcase, and two or three gas ranges.

Cautiously Retson slipped his master key into a lock, pushed open the door, and slipped inside. The dim night lights showed no

bandits, but Retson knew that their lookout had spotted him and they had hidden. Retson wasn't the man to turn back. Single-handed he would find the bandits, rout them, and be in line for a sergeantry.

Carefully he made his way down the aisle. He heard footsteps and dodged behind a counter. The footsteps approached. Gun drawn, Retson waited.

Then the night watchman, making his rounds, came into sight. He saw Retson, and Retson saw him. Questions.

"Aw," said the watchman, "I've been trying for two days to get them to fix that radiator in the stairway. It gets fits of pounding like a trip hammer."

When Retson ended his tour of duty this morning at 8 o'clock, he said nothing about his adventure. But deeds of daring have a way of becoming known.

What is humorous about a rookie policeman doing his duty with more ambition than wisdom? It will be many days before the joshing about this episode dies. Because of it, Retson may be less zealous the next time.

Inferences are equally perilous. Four officers, including a lieutenant, have been reassigned within a fortnight. The chief murmurs of "routine transfers," but the reporter is thinking in another language:

Weeks of rumors of a drastic police-department shake-up culminated yesterday in actuality when the fifth officer in sixteen days to be pried loose from his former duties was sent to another assignment. He is Sergt. Benjamin Cudahy, transferred by Chief Arthur S. Bryant from the traffic bureau to the detective division.

Chief Bryant continued to say what he has said ever since the shake-up began, "A routine transfer," but observers at headquarters discounted this "explanation." They pointed out that. . . .

And the reporter is on the crest of a wave of interviewing himself and attributing his own interpretations to "observers at headquarters." Next day Chief Bryant releases a stack of reports from the department surgeon, recommending that the five officers be given different duties because of their physical condition. Two go temporarily to lighter work, two others are permanently on less rigorous assignments, and one, previously at a desk job, has recuperated enough to resume pounding a beat. Shake-up? Not this time; the reporter jumped too soon.

Tom sees on his second day why the police run is so valuable. The police and fire departments often are among the first sources to know of "emergency" news. A youngster living on the edge of the city is being operated upon, at home, for tonsils and adenoids. Something goes wrong, and the surgeon telephones the hospital for a tank of oxygen. The police furnish a motorcycle escort, whose sirens clear the road so that the car with the oxygen makes the seven miles in six minutes. The boy is saved, and Tom has a splendid little story that never would have become known except that its path passed through the police station.

#### OFFICE POLICY

Office policy now deserves more explicit treatment. Each newspaper has a well crystallized set of preferences, of do and don't orders. A paper, for example, usually omits names of persons arrested for drunkenness, because it has found that the police make no effort to verify the names and that only two men out of a dozen tell their right names. To have them suffer the publicity the others escape would be unfair, and so the newspaper omits drunkenness arrests unless coupled with unusual circumstances. Another paper prints the full details of a fight between two men but cuts a husband-and-wife brawl to a single paragraph. Tom must learn quickly, by watching what the copy editors do to his stories and by asking the city editor, how the office policy affects the police beat. The impact of policy is likely to be strongest on the police run, because that is where so many of the disputable stories originate. Sad to say, the policy isn't detailed in the stylebook. Through the years it has been built up slowly, and it is handed on from one police reporter to the next by word of mouth rather than in any formal fashion. Tom is not thereby deceived; he knows that, for all of its seeming amorphousness, office policy is a body of powerful law that the executives demand be observed faithfully.

The police run brings Tom almost countless pleas, many hysteric and tearful, to "keep this story out of the paper." An insurance company has had one of its collectors arrested. He insists that it is all a "misunderstanding" and that the money tangle will be cleared up before court time tomorrow. "Don't

print it," he begs. "My wife's in the maternity hospital, and you know what that story would do to her." When these situations arise, the wife always is in the maternity wing; never is she having an appendix removed or a broken arm set.

"If the boss finds out about this," pleads a taxi driver arrested for racing another driver at sixty on a boulevard street, "I'm fired, and my wife's about to have a baby."

It is not the reporter's privilege to decide these cases. If office policy does not give him the answer, his only reply is, "I'll pass your request on to the city editor." About the time the reporter has judged that the executive won't suppress anything, the city editor surprises him by suggesting, "Tom, this is a good little story, but I think we'll forget it." Tom asks why, and the answer reveals a knowledge of conditions in the city that seems utterly impossible for an executive who spends all day inside the office. "Glory," Tom reflects, "the boss knows his way around."

He does, and that is one reason why Tom will not on his own authority grant or reject a request to kill a story. If he accedes, the editor may find out about it, and then Tom will be on the carpet for going beyond his authority. "I suppose Old Man Weldon told you this was the first time that brat of his has been in trouble? It isn't. The old man always makes good for the kid, but we told him two years ago that we wouldn't keep the boy's name out of the paper. Know how many times he's been arrested for bad checks? This is the fourth time. Not as smart as you thought, Tom."

However it varies in other details, office policy approaches standardization on three points. The first fixes the age limit below which the paper will not go in telling the names of persons arrested. In some states cases heard in juvenile court, where the age limit is sixteen, cannot be printed, yet office policy, for one reason or another, may set the age at seventeen. Whether sixteen, seventeen, or some other age, the policy establishes a limit.

The second common point is in regard to suicides. A businessman, known to be distressingly in debt and to have borrowed every cent he could on his insurance, is found dead in his garage, killed by carbon monoxide from a motor "carelessly" left running while he shut the garage doors. Beyond doubt it was suicide, but the

paper does not suggest this possibility until the coroner or medical examiner returns his official findings. Sometimes, even in the clearest instance of suicide, the coroner will report "accidental death" or will omit any reference to self-destruction.

The third general agreement is about prominent residents. The more conspicuous a person, the less likely that he can get a story about himself suppressed. News of well-known individuals travels fast and far, and a newspaper that granted exemptions to the influential soon would be known as doing so, to the vast detriment of its prestige. The policy is, accordingly, that no reporter shall comply with a prominent person's request to "keep it out," and that all such requests go to an executive, who almost invariably says "No."

How far down in the list of crimes a reporter digs for news varies with the individual paper. The larger the city, the fewer routine crimes are printed. In Chicago a housebreak netting twenty-eight dollars worth of loot is too minor to get into the paper, unless it has surprising and unusual aspects; in Concordia, population 8,216, the theft of a \$1.65 shirt from a clothesline is worth a paragraph. This distinction between metropolis and small city is shown at its best in crime news. Only the worst crimes find space in the big-town press; in the smaller paper all crime is used, because so many readers know or know of the persons involved, and accordingly an arrest for going thirty on a twenty-five-mile street is news.

The small-city paper gives as many details of a major crime as does the metropolitan, but it presents them more quietly, without intensification. In the smaller town, the persons involved are individuals, neighbors, friends, or acquaintances of many readers; in the bigger city they are names, interesting chiefly because of the actions connected with them rather than in their own right.

A good police reporter is merciful. The Rev. George Swatchem is arrested in an illegitimacy case. Because of the man's position, publicity hurts worse than it would crush someone in a less "exemplary" station in life. The Rev. Mr. Swatchem, out on bail, must expect to read about his arrest, but he should not find himself described as a Don Juan, a hypocrite, or a philanderer. It

would be easy to call him an "alleged love-nest pastor," but it would be indefensibly cruel. He isn't guilty until the court has found him so.

### ALLEGED

"Alleged," used so freely by police reporters, has no slightest value as a protection against a possible libel suit.

It is alleged that he then enticed Mrs. Dracut into giving him \$1,350 she had withdrawn from the savings bank, and he then allegedly eloped with the Morrisville girl.

If a disparaging statement, potentially libelous, must be used to make a story complete, it should be ascribed to a direct source to show that it has foundation other than that of gossip or rumor. "Police declared" is evidence that the reporter went to the most official source for his information. "The alleged swindler" has the same damaging effect in the eyes of the law as does an unembellished "the swindler." Knowing the libel laws is more to the point than putting blind reliance upon "alleged" as a touchstone for printing rumors and thin-air information.

The good reporter's mercy extends to the families of those accused or even convicted of crime. Attorney Roland Roydon is charged with misappropriating from an estate for which he was administrator. Attorney Roydon is one of the best known lawyers in the city, and the story of his crime is of breath-taking interest. That does not justify long accounts about his family, telling that the daughter, aged nineteen, is a sophomore at Ather-ton College, where she is class president, a member of the Y.W.C.A. executive board, and a singer in the college choir. Instead of exploiting the daughter, the paper in a single paragraph tells of Attorney Roydon's family, if indeed it mentions the family at all.

### WEARY PHRASINGS

The excitement and glamor of police reporting are undeniable but not continuous. Once or twice a year, a story is so hot that the reporter thrills in handling it. In the interim, nothing happens except assault-and-battery cases, all the same except for

the names, and hit-and-run drivers, monotonously alike. Because so many stories run in the same channel, the reporter, having devised an attractive phrasing, uses it again and again, until it is threadbare and no longer attractive. Whenever a man is hunted ambitiously, a "police cordon" is thrown about the city, a "dragnet" is spread, and the community is "scoured." Every suspect questioned for more than six minutes is "grilled" or undergoes a "gruelling" interrogation. Any man wanted for a crime more serious than attempted assault becomes "Public Enemy No. 1." Every person previously convicted is a "notorious" criminal. No burglar breaks into a house; he "gains entrance." The fellow who slips away from an officer taking him to the station makes a "bold dash for freedom." An armed robbery must be conducted "at the point of a pistol." Any automobile driver chased by a prowler car for two blocks was having a "wild ride." Young hoodlums caught robbing a filling station were making their "debut to a career of crime."

Of all the distorted words, "youth" has been twisted the most. A youth is a male who has yet to attain his majority, but to the police reporter "youth" means any man under forty-five. "Youth" is a softening word, connoting that the person is so young that he has not had time enough to become a hardened criminal. The word should be reserved for genuine youths. If a minor and an adult commit a crime, too often they will be described thus:

. . . two Herndon County youths, Adolf Roy, 18, and George Tiber, 29, . . . .

The police reporter has a little more excuse than have some of his colleagues for overusing and misusing words. Many stories must be written rapidly, and the police reporter saves time by reaching into the barrel for a phrasing he has used before rather than devising a fresher way of saying it. Soon he employs the same words so often that they are as standardized as Chevrolet wrist pins. His remedy is synonyms. Investing a couple of hours in finding and learning other ways of expressing recurrent ideas is well worth the effort.

Blowing up a story to keep it on page 1 each day for a fort-



night, or even to keep it in the paper at all, is reprehensible because it gives the crime a prominence out of focus with the facts and often compels the reporter to go far beyond those facts. A filling-station proprietor is killed in a holdup on Sunday night. On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday the story is easy to write, because police activity is abundant and obvious, but on Thursday the story runs down. There are no more suspects to be questioned, no more clues, and the police have nothing to say.

"How about the murder?" the city editor asks.

"Not a thing new," Tom Hastings replies.

"Well, find something," the executive snaps.

Tom accepts the order as unnailling the lid, as meaning "anything goes." He begins to spin his own theories and to link every possible arrest with the murder. Detective Moriarty brings in a prisoner and hustles him directly to a cell. "What's up, Pat?" Tom asks.

"Harrrrrakkkkk," Moriarty gurgles.

"Ha," Tom tells himself, "so Moriarty's gone hush-hush. Well, I know what to do with that." He approaches the desk officer.

"What's it all about, Tim?"

The answer is, truthfully, "I don't know," but Tom doesn't see it that way. "Aha," Tom thinks, "the whole department's tongue-tied; that means plenty." His story begins:

A suspect whom police refused to identify was brought in this noon and immediately questioned in regard to the murder Sunday night of Oscar Webb, filling-station manager killed in a holdup that netted the slayer only \$14.

Detective Patrick Moriarty, who made the pickup, refused all information about the suspect and other officers declined to discuss the case.

It is known, however, that. . . .

Actually, Moriarty had picked up a fellow in connection with a burglary, not with the murder. From him, Moriarty already had information demanding a top-speed visit elsewhere. He simply didn't have time to answer Tom's questions. If Tom had chased him, Moriarty would have explained. But Tom found it easier to jump at conclusions than to wear out shoe leather.

When the city editor commanded, "Well, find something," he didn't mean quite what he said. He knew that keeping a story alive often is hard work and that reporters sometimes don't push as hard as they should for new angles. Therefore, to make sure that Tom was diligent and persistent, the city editor barked louder than usual. He was not ordering Tom to start pipe-dreaming; he was only saying, "Burrow into that story until you're sure there's nothing new." Every schoolteacher knows the necessity for some overstatements, but Tom didn't.

Promising "spectacular" or "sensational" developments tomorrow is a risky way of keeping a story alive. The developments may not come, and readers rightly will indict the paper for exaggerating.

Yet a story can be kept alive without being inflated. Now and then a review of the history will do the trick. Other times a recital of bits that previously were mentioned only on the run, because of the pressure of apparently stronger information, is useful. An account of how intensively the police have worked is another device. A comparison or contrast of this new crime with earlier felonies will be interesting. Any of these methods permits taking today's one paragraph about "police are continuing their search" as a prelude to a summary of one sort or another.

This ancient material is interesting if well written, and it is valuable in putting the crime into a more accurate perspective than was possible when its news was splattering all over page 1.

#### GIVE THE POLICE A CHANCE

When a crime interests him, Tom is in danger of impatience. He wants action right away, and the police cannot supply it. He writes:

This was the sixth day since Oscar Webb was murdered in a filling-station holdup that netted the killer only \$14, but police are as far away now from a solution of the crime as they were Sunday night when it happened. Two more suspects were brought in this morning, questioned briefly, and then released by the thoroughly baffled officers.

This is terrifically unfair. Many a time the police have the thinnest of threads to lace into a pattern, and perforce they must

weave slowly and patiently. That they have not found the murderer within forty-eight hours is not to their discredit, but it is to Tom's if he lets his thirst for immediate action intoxicate him.

Nor is Tom justified in pillorying an officer who refuses to explain his every thought and action. Surely Detective Moriarty has something abuzz in the back of his mind, but he doesn't know yet whether it is a bee or a wasp and he prefers to be more confident before he gets his name in print. Tom has no license to write:

Detective Patrick Moriarty, in charge of the investigation of the holdup murder of Oscar Webb, filling-station manager, on Sunday night, the 14th, today refused to reveal what if any progress he is making. To all inquiries, Moriarty returned a gruff "Later," or no answer at all.

Crime follow stories always must include a tie-in with the first-day account, to help readers who missed the opening installment. On the second day and perhaps the third this tie-in, coming immediately after the lead, tell in several paragraphs the high spots of the original story:

Webb was killed Sunday night about 11:45, as he prepared to close the station. He was shot twice with a 38-caliber pistol.

The shots were heard by Oak-Street residents who called the police. No eyewitnesses were found, but police obtained descriptions of several men who were in the neighborhood late Sunday night.

Mrs. Webb fainted when notified of her husband's death. Later she said that her husband had remarked several times recently that he felt that the station was being "looked over" and feared a holdup. He had promised, she said, that if a bandit came he would make no resistance.

As the days pass, the tie-in becomes more and more brief. It dwindles to a single sentence and then to a few words. When circumstances justify, the tie-in includes a label, such as "green-hat murderer" or "revenge slaying." This label is "journalese," but it is more than justified, because it gives the copy editor a tag to put into the headline and thus helps interested readers

find today's installment quickly. They come to look for "green-hat killer" in the headline and thus locate the story easily.

Tom may or may not enjoy doing police, but he is handling news that requires consistently excellent treatment. Managed rightly, crime news is of enormous social value; mismanaged, it is hideously harmful.

NEWS OF ACCIDENTS

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## AMBULANCE CHASING

“**A**MBULANCE,” the desk sergeant orders crisply into the telephone. “Western Avenue, just beyond Three-Mile Pond.”

“Auto smash?” asks the reporter “doing police.”

The sergeant nods. “Fellow who called in says, ‘Half a dozen bodies, all over the road.’”

Already the siren is wailing as the police ambulance rumbles out of the driveway. A moment later the reporter’s car swishes around the corner and is chasing the ambulance.

Automobile accidents can be ghastly . . . blood spurting from mangled faces . . . splintered bones sticking out of crushed bodies . . . women’s low moans . . . children’s shrieks of terror.

On the other hand, the first report of an accident often is a panicky exaggeration. The “half a dozen bodies” may fade into one man with a cut across the back of his left hand. “Never can tell until you get there,” the reporter reminds himself.

Trailing the ambulance is one of the harder assignments. Often the police need help in extricating victims from the tangled cars or in carrying the suffering to the ambulance. Because they know the reporter well, they ask his assistance.

Now or later every reporter must do the “ambulance run” for a while. This is well, for it gives a needed soberness and maturity. Because close-ups of tragedy and suffering are so devastating, the reporter grows an armadillo shell into which he can retire whenever necessary. Acquiring such a shell is ample justification for “doing accidents.”

Accident stories frequently call for masterful reporting, because the conditions under which they are covered are so unfavorable. Gathering information is difficult. It is one job when the reporter goes to the accident scene and quite another if he merely transcribes the police or the sheriff's records.

Going to the scene gives him a much more vivid story, with a lively chance for inaccuracies. Everyone is excited; some are in panic, a few are half mad with pain, the police are harassed in keeping back the push of the curious—and from this welter the reporter must obtain his facts, accurate up to and including the middle initials.

### THREE IMMEDIATE DEMANDS

The reporter's three first concerns will be: (1) to spot a telephone; (2) to see whether the accident is worth calling a photographer; and (3) to get names, the casualty list. The city editor must know at once whether the accident is routine or worse, so that if it is worse he can have space saved for it on the first page.

Locating a telephone is the first order of business. If the accident happened well within the city, the nearest store or house is almost certain to have an instrument. If the smash was in the thinly settled outskirts, the reporter had better start watching the wires before he reaches the scene to see which buildings are tapped by telephone connections, because phones may be unbelievably far between. For the reporter on a morning paper, the late-night smashup may be hard to handle, since few householders may have heard the accident and have left their beds to find out what happened. Punching doorbells at 1:45 A.M. in quest of a telephone is one of reporting's less enjoyable aspects.

A glance should show whether the accident is worth a picture. If it is the usual wrenching and twisting of steel, probably it isn't, for similar pictures have been used so often that now they are in disfavor unless the accident had an unusual phase. The car given to a youngster less than twenty-four hours before as a college graduation present is worth a picture almost any day, even though it is in good enough condition to be worth repairing. So is the car in which a United States Senator was injured. Certainly the machine that turned over four times without hurting

any of its six passengers merits a picture. If there are no such outstanding circumstances, a wreck probably must be fatal before the city editor will send a cameraman.

But the city editor must know the situation, for photographers may be busy with garden club exhibits or new officers of missionary societies and may take some finding before they can be pried loose. Smashed cars are towed away almost as soon as the ambulance leaves, and if the photographer delays the best shot he can get will be inside a garage, showing a little of the battered car and a great deal of grey cement wall. Again, the city editor must know speedily about pictures, so that the make-up editor can be warned to save space and the engraver can be told that a rush job is coming up.

Because of their perpetual uncertainty, names must be collected at once. "I didn't get his name," the driver of the police patrol car explains. "He was hurt too bad; they had to get him to the hospital right away. I'll pick up the name later."

"I looked at his wallet," the other policeman volunteers. "Didn't have time for more than a glance. The name was Williams—of Summer Street."

When the reporter phones in the name, the city editor discovers that the directory lists Thomas A. Williams, 419 Summer Street, and John G. Williams, 2405 Summer Street. The car registration number is traced to someone named Fordyce. Half an hour of telephoning and interviewing may be needed to determine whether Thomas or John Williams was the injured man.

If the accident happened far enough ahead of edition time, the reporter should not be so rushed. The bad accidents, however, seem to come near press time.

### NAMES MUST BE RIGHT

Whatever stress heretofore has been put upon getting names straight must now be doubled. A page 1 story with a picture of the supposed victim announces that "Henry D. Alden" has been killed. Mrs. Alden is prostrated, sympathetic friends hurry to the house to give their futile assistance. Eventually someone wonders why the police haven't notified the family of the accident. Telephone calls. "Henry D. Altman" was the man who was

killed. The Alden family and the Alden friends never will forgive the newspaper for the hour of agony caused by that wrong name in the story—and there is no reason why they should forgive.

Whatever names the police offer, whatever names are indicated by car registration plates or by letters in pockets of coats found in the wrecked cars, these names are to be checked scrupulously. The reporter telephones the names to the office and asks that they be verified.

The ambulance driver knows the unconscious man who is being loaded into the vehicle. "Sure, he's Jim Furness. Belongs to the same lodge I do."

"The woman's his wife?" the reporter asks.

"I suppose so," the driver answers. "Same age, about, and she has a wedding ring. No, she won't come to for a long while; no chance of asking her."

If the reporter writes that "Mr. and Mrs. James C. Furness were badly injured" he will have some tall explaining to do when the facts catch up with him and he learns that at the time of the accident Mrs. Furness was home baking a cake and that the woman with Mr. Furness was his sister.

If names cannot be verified *conclusively*, they are to be given as "tentative" and the reason is to be presented:

Police believe the driver was George H. Jackson, 212 Miami Avenue, because of letters found in a coat in the car.

Aren't the probabilities that the man was Jackson great enough to permit an identification? Emphatically no. Jackson may have lent the car to a friend, and said, "It's too hot to bother with my coat. Leave it in the rear seat, Bill; I won't need it before you get back."

The reporter eschews the ancient device of estimating a car's speed by the place at the dial on which the speedometer needle jammed. That the needle wedged at eighty doesn't mean the car was going that fast. When the impact came, the needle hopped all around the dial and it merely happened to be at eighty rather than at ten when the engine pushed back against the dashboard and "froze" the pointer.



## BE CAREFUL WITH STATEMENTS

Immediate statements of witnesses or of accident victims cannot be relied upon, because the excitement may have upset the persons so that they hardly know what they say. These statements are printable, but they are to be qualified with a warning of their possible inexactnesses:

Mrs. Henshaw, so upset that physicians had to give her a sedative before taking her to the hospital, told police that her husband had been driving about 85 miles an hour. . . .

Contradictory versions of an accident should be offered impartially and objectively:

Durwent, driver of the bus, said that he was on his own side of the road and that his machine was hit when the sedan swerved far to the left. McMahon, operator of the sedan, said that he turned slightly to the left to pass a parked car but that he did not cross the white line in the center of the road.

Now see how partisan an interpretation can become. In the specimen that follows, the reporter believes that the bus driver inevitably must be culpable, and accordingly cuts down the busman's testimony and exalts that of the other man:

The two drivers disputed sharply as to the cause of the accident. McMahon, the sedan driver, insisted that he was well on his own side and that the bus hogged the road.

"It must have been going 70," he said. "I didn't have a chance of escaping it."

Durwent, the bus operator, claimed McMahon's car swerved to the left and struck the bus. McMahon corrected this, explaining that he turned slightly to pass a parked car.

"You don't go clear over to the left to get around a parked car," he pointed out.

From this one example the reporter welds one of the few rules-of-thumb worth enough to bother remembering: never, whatever the circumstances, allocate blame or responsibility in an on-the-spot accident story. Two instances, taken from actuality rather than manufactured for textbook purposes, show why:

Murphy admitted that he had been driving at excessive speed. "We were going too fast, too damn fast," he repeated over and over.

Hospital physicians later described him as suffering from shock and hysteria.

Another man staggered down the center of the road, his broken left arm hanging limp and useless. He sang softly, getting many of the words wrong. A bystander rushed to him.

"Get back to the car. The cops'll be here in a minute and they'll haul you in for leaving the scene of an accident."

"What accident?" the injured man inquired. "What accident?"

The bystander turned him around, led him back. When he saw his daughter unconscious beside the smashed car, he fainted. At the hospital he was listed as having a broken arm and brain concussion.

What an accident will do to a person's nervous system cannot be predicted. Some babble inanely, others hardly can speak, and still others retain their faculties and are alert to offer a version that puts the other fellow in the wrong. Police in some communities are zealous for on-the-spot statements, on the idea that not enough time has elapsed for a man to fabricate a good story. They forget that the statements of a distraught man, sometimes suffering agonizing pain, may be unintentionally but glaringly inaccurate. For a reporter to reconstruct an accident in more than the most tentative fashion from such testimony is the entire alphabet of presumption and injustice.

Certainly the reporter will not impute intoxication to the automobile driver, however many whiskey bottles may be found in the car. Shock and drunkenness sometimes are deceptively alike.

How far the reporter may discuss accident causes and responsibility is determined largely by office policy, which varies greatly from one paper to another. Among the more common policies are these:

1. Blame never is allocated without an official report from an authorized investigating agency. The example that follows is faulty because it has not yet been demonstrated to be true:

Engineer Greeley ran by the flagman's signals without slackening the speed of his train.

Engineer Greeley may have seemed to do this, but investigation is necessary to show whether he was so derelict, whether the flagman had his signals placed properly, whether Greeley's air-brakes failed, or whether the distance involved simply was too small for him to stop his train in time to avoid a wreck.

An acceptable phrasing would be:

Although a flagman had been dispatched to halt his train, Engineer Greeley was unable to stop in time.

This in no way suggests where the blame should rest. Readers may be impatient to know "whose fault it was," but that information is not yet available and no reporter will risk a guess.

2. Details of "what happened" are attributed to the persons furnishing those details, except in the minority of instances in which the action is indisputably clear. The example that follows is faulty in that it may not be correct:

Marchand's car sideswiped the Haynes machine, which went out of control and slewed into the ditch.

It is quite possible that Haynes's car did the sideswiping. Therefore, the reporter will quote a source for his interpretation or reconstruction:

State Traffic Patrolman Henry D. Ellis said that apparently Marchand's car sideswiped the Haynes machine, which went out of control. . . .

This version is not free of potential libel, but it can be defended as fair and reasonable in that it is presented as the view of an individual rather than as fact indisputable. If the reporter felt that even more care should be used, he would write:

State Traffic Patrolman Henry D. Ellis said that one car sideswiped the other and the Haynes machine then went out of control. . . .

An accident subject to qualifications as to its cause would be a bridge collapsing under the weight of a train. Even here there

would be no suggestion that the engineer handled his train improperly, and thereby overstrained the bridge.

### DON'T LINGER TOO LONG

A new reporter is so fascinated in watching the wreckers clear the highway that he remains for an hour, and then discusses the accident forty minutes more with bystanders. Pricked by sudden misgivings, he rushes for the office.

"Good story coming," he pants. "Worth front page. One man killed and three hurt—one of them's going to die."

"He has died already," the city editor replies frostily. "We found that out at the hospital thirty minutes ago. Also we got a picture although you didn't bother to tell us to send a photographer. You've been gone two hours and twenty minutes. Did you have a nice visit with your grandmother back in the old country?"

It will take the reporter days to live down this lamentable proof that he is still a grass-green cub. Better to be an over-eager pest, annoying the city editor every five minutes with needless telephone calls, than a forgetful blockhead.

One reason for informing the city editor promptly of the status of a story is that often an accompanying or "with" chronicle must be written. The Kingman house, 136 years old, is burning. "Harry," the city editor directs, "work us up a story about other landmarks that burned."

Usually the "with" story is built upon research in the newspaper's library. The card index supposedly is so thoroughly cross-indexed that the reporter can find in a few minutes the particular issues which carried the stories he needs for his background account. He lists these issues and consults them in the bound volumes that are the newspaper's most sacred archives.

All too often the cross-indexing has been fragmentary. Then the reporter must whirl his ingenuity to find out where the fire stories of yesteryear may be. "Fires," "Conflagrations," "Blazes," "Blasts," "Explosions"—eventually he runs them down.

He avoids scrupulously one bit of high treason; to commit it would brand him almost everlastingly as a dismal greenhorn. That treason is to snip a clipping from a bound volume. Thirty

seconds with the shears may save ten minutes of rewriting, but those thirty seconds ruin that page in the bound volume for future reference and spoil also its reverse side. Two pages killed. The city editor reveals a vocabulary that the cub never before had suspected.

### RECONSTRUCTING AN ACCIDENT

The first information telephoned in, the reporter returns to the scene to find out "how it happened." If there were eyewitnesses, he takes their statements, and on paper so that he will have no chance of misremembering. He is not the least disturbed when each of four eyewitnesses gives a conflicting report. No one expects to see an accident; most "witnesses" became such only when they heard the collision. What they saw was the result, not the event itself. Of the few who genuinely saw the smash, many had a partial view because they were too busy getting or keeping out of the way to give their full attention to the accident itself.

The police or the sheriff's deputies, by experience more expert observers, will contribute something for they are able from the results to visualize the accident itself with fair ingenuity. Their version, however, is preliminary; they will have clearer ideas when they have had an opportunity to go over at length the statements of the persons directly involved. In some communities the officers seem anxious mainly to "hang something" on a driver and can be expected to reconstruct an accident more to find out what charges they can lodge than to determine actually what happened.

From his own observation, the reporter completes the picture. He has seen the cars and can figure from the way in which they were damaged how they must have struck. These decisions are tentative, however, for 3,000 pounds of metal can move in amazing fashion when thrown suddenly from their course.

Piecing together all these versions, the reporter has a summary from which he can write with fair confidence. "What happened" probably is reasonably clear; "how it happened" means of course "Who's to blame?" and that is for the law to determine. No reporter wishes to imply that Samuel Winch was at fault and have

Winch, brooding and melancholy, go down cellar two days later and shoot himself because he has become convinced from the newspapers that he was criminally culpable. This has happened.

If the accident resulted in death, a statement from the coroner or medical examiner is needed. It is an official proclamation of what process the law expects to take in determining who, if anyone, was at fault.

Circumstances take strange turns, as the incident that follows will indicate. The episode is taken from reality; it is not manufactured.

A bus with the insignia of the Green and Yellow lines is wrecked and the reporter unhesitatingly terms it a Green and Yellow vehicle. The next day the Green and Yellow objects: it had sold that bus seventy-two hours before to the Black and Gold company, which hadn't had time to put its own name on the vehicle. Had the reporter known the bus schedules, he would have realized that no Green and Yellow should have been on the road at that time. He didn't know, and the Green and Yellow officials required considerable soothing. Three days later another bus sold by the Green and Yellow, this time to the Orange and White, was wrecked. It, too, still carried the Green and Yellow markings. Such things happen rarely? Providence be praised; yet they happen often enough that the reporter accepts nothing as final until he can prove it by adding the figures up, down, and crosswise. Only then will he make more than a preliminary statement. Complete accuracy is his business and accident stories are too serious to permit omitting reservations and qualifications.

#### COLD ACCIDENTS

The time factor decides whether the reporter returns to the office to write his story or whether he telephones the information and has a "rewrite man" prepare the story. The nearer an edition deadline, the more likely a reporter is to use the telephone.

Many reporters try nothing more intricate than presenting the information; they let the rewrite man decide the story's structure. An expert reporter—and sometimes a big-headed one who merely hopes he's an expert—may dictate a story rather than an

accumulation of notes. To do this successfully is entirely different from "thinking on the typewriter" and is the mark of a competent man. Except when time is only a mild issue, it is better for a reporter of incomplete seasoning to phone his notes and let the rewrite man do the phrasing.

The same care in verifying identifications is necessary when a reporter covers an accident secondhand, getting his information from the police reports. For all that their statements are official, the police and the deputies exhibit in them at least the average human frailty and inaccuracy. Names and addresses may be guessed at, in the confidence that, if the accident demands court charges, there will be time later to correct any errors. Officers also allocate the blame, and the reporter should accredit definitely to their sources any statements of culpability that he puts into his stories. "The Johnson car failed to halt for an arterial stop-sign" is an undiluted accusation of lawbreaking, extremely serious if the accident caused a death and the driver is charged with manslaughter. "The police report said that the Johnson car apparently failed to halt for an arterial stop-sign" is a little safer from the point of view of libel, and infinitely more fair because it presents the reflection on the driver as a personal judgment rather than as clear-cut fact.

Officers sometimes have wobbly notions as to the seriousness of an accident. "Both cars were badly damaged" may mean that one machine required a \$2.45 fender straightening and that the other needed a new tail-light glass. Particularly when he expects to order a driver into court is an officer likely to magnify an accident. A three-dollar damage collision seems slight background for an accusation of "driving so as to endanger the lives and safety of the public," which can mean a fine of fifty dollars and loss of driver's license for a year.

The police records should be read alertly rather than randomly, for an officer's sketchy and unimaginative description may mask an unusual accident:

Kirk said that he swung on to sidewalk to avoid child. Child was Dorothy Munroe, 7, 1193 Erin St. Child not hurt. Kirk thrown part way through windshield when car hit light post. Kirk taken to Gen. Hosp. in car driven by Randolph Eames, Water-

ville. Had head and face lacerations sewed up. Child's doll carriage crushed.

Here may be something interesting. The child was unhurt, but her doll carriage was wrecked. That may show how narrowly the girl missed being killed or it may be the clue to a freak accident in which she wasn't in the least danger. The reporter interviews the officer, Kirk, the child, and perhaps a couple of the witnesses. He then may have a distinctive accident story. The difference between the reporter whose stories never get farther front than page 6 and one who makes the first page at least twice a week often is due mainly to the fact that the superior man investigates thoroughly and the other fellow is content to rephrase the policeman's report. "Luck," says the page 6 man. "Just luck; the good accidents happen on my days off." The city editor has another name for it.

#### DROWNINGS

Next to automobile accidents, drownings are the most worrisome accident stories, because there are so many of them.

A drowning is likely to have more witnesses—or none at all. Testimony may be more reliable than that of persons who almost saw an auto accident. Drownings take longer and witnesses therefore have more chance to see an appreciable part of the picture.

Yet stories of drownings or near-drownings may have less "direct" testimony. The survivors, if any, are likely to be half full of water and unable to talk until tomorrow. Through interviewing eyewitnesses, friends, and neighbors of the unfortunate swimmers or boatmen, the reporter finds out when the victims left the shore, what they had planned to do, how far they had gone before getting into trouble, what rescue efforts were made and by whom. Only if he is doubly lucky can he find out for a first-day story how and why the boat capsized.

If rough water seemed a factor, the reporter expects that a dozen persons warned the boatmen that "the lake was too stormy; I told 'em not to go out on a day like this." Sometimes it isn't true. Conscience pricks the on-shore people who begin to say



to themselves, "Now if I'd told those kids the water was too rough, maybe they'd have stayed home." In a few minutes the on-shore folk have convinced themselves that truly they did warn the youngsters. To proclaim these warnings as fact makes the accident victims seem foolhardy and reckless far more perhaps than they really were. Until he is convinced that the unfortunates were amply warned, the reporter qualifies this part of the story by changing "the boys were told that the lake was dangerously rough" to read "Floyd Henneman and John Smiley said they had cautioned the boys that the lake was dangerously rough." That one word "said" gives the entire paragraph a different tenor.

#### ONE DROWNED, ONE SAVED

The most awkward situation comes when one person has saved himself but his companion drowned. Not "was drowned," by the way, for that suggests that someone held the victim's head under water rather as an unwanted kitten is disposed of. The man who saved himself will be condemned for not trying to rescue his companion. He did try? "Yes, but not hard enough. Me, I'd never desert a fellow like that. I'd stay with him until. . . ." Perhaps the fellow who made shore did strike out alone too soon, but the chances are excellent that he saved himself only when he found that he could not rescue his comrade and made the hard but sensible decision that one man alive is better than two men drowned. Towing a companion ashore sounds easy enough, but it can be impossibly hard. Water-soaked clothes weigh frightfully, and the comrade may be terrified and lock his hands around his rescuer's throat. However indignant the on-shore faction, the reporter refrains from passing judgment. This restraint may call for a conscious effort but it is admirably worth while.

Henderson admitted that he hit Downey in the face to break the latter's grip on his throat, and then swam to shore alone while his partner was left to drown.

This is the acme of unfairness. No one has any justification for such writing until he knows each and every circumstance, however slight, and the reporter cannot have this knowledge.

The old hallucination about a person "going down three times" should be exorcised. The number of times a man sinks before he drowns is not standardized; it may be once, or it may be a dozen times. What decides it is how much water he took into his lungs on each plunge. Yet the reporters continue the superstition of "three times and drown." How many persons, thrown into the water, have sunk twice and then, remembering that tradition, have given up and ceased to fight when they went down for the third time?

Another tradition, however, is likely to be valid. It is that the time of an accident can be told by noticing when the victim's watch stopped. It will stop within a few moments of immersion. The only chance that this mute testimony will be wrong is the slight one that the watch ran down before the boat capsized.

Many reporters are commendably cautious about accidents in which the body of the victim has not been recovered, and say that the man "is believed to have drowned." The fatality of many nighttime and of an appreciable number of daytime accidents has at least a shade of doubt until the body is found. The person may have reached shore, at an isolated spot, and have collapsed, too weak to stagger to a house. Whether this is reasonably possible obviously depends upon the local circumstances. It does happen.

The reporter gathers full details of rescue attempts. To the general public, they are interesting reading; to the family of the victim, they are comforting details that help reconcile the family to the inevitability of the tragedy.

How long artificial resuscitation should be continued varies with the case. Twenty minutes may be enough to show a doctor that there is no chance of reviving the victim; in other instances, life may spark after more than an hour. For the reporter to write indignantly because the doctor announces "no use" a little sooner than the newsman thinks proper is sheer conceit.

#### TRAIN WRECKS

It is page 1 news when a train gets into trouble. It happens rarely enough to be automatically newsworthy. The railroad

wreck story generally is hard to write because gathering information is difficult.

The railroad men can't talk; they lose their jobs if they do. To ask them "Why?" and "Whose fault was it?" is a waste of breath. Those questions are to be answered when the inevitable trio of investigations is in progress. The Interstate Commerce Commission, the state, and the railroad company will try to find out, and it is only at these inquiries that the trainmen can talk.

A further complication is that wrecks happen in remote places. The reporter may have had to wade a swamp or climb a mountain to get there.

Yet in one thing he will have the active help of the railroad workers. That is in obtaining and verifying the casualty list. The railroad must know, speedily, how many were hurt or killed, who, and where they are now. Perhaps the injured have been taken not to one hospital but to two or three hospitals. Some of those alive an hour ago may be dead now.

"You've got a Harry Johnson listed as dead," the reporter breaks in upon the conductor. "Well, he isn't."

"How do you know?"

"The office has just checked all the hospitals, and the fellow they sent to help me has the hospitals' list. Johnson is over at Centerville Memorial with a broken leg. He's 25 years from being dead."

The railroad men never are too busy to revise a casualty list. In return for the reporter's information, they will give tidbits that may help markedly to clarify the story.

The first account of a wreck will have little to say as to the cause. The second-day story probably will be amplified by a statement from the railroad. Even when the cause is dim and unreachable, the first-day story will be strong and interesting. It had better be toned down rather than jacked up as regards the casualty list. To announce today "ten killed" and tomorrow to say "only six killed" suggests both that the later story is hardly worth reading and that the first account was "the usual newspaper exaggeration." Much better to use the most conservative estimate in the first chronicle, "Four killed," and on the next day

be able to say, "Six killed." Thus the second story obviously goes beyond the original writing and hence is worth reading, and the paper cannot be condemned for exaggerating. Indeed, some press association writers as a matter of policy cut a casualty estimate in half for the first-day stories. This is an excellent practice for the young reporter.

#### NINE PIECES OF INFORMATION

Among the items to be rounded up are these:

1. What happened to the passengers of the wrecked train; how were they sent on to their destinations? Often this tangent grows into an interesting two or three paragraphs. Perhaps the only cars available on the far side of the wreck are old wooden day coaches and the passengers from the air-conditioned, all-Pullman flyer must travel seventy-five miles in these jouncy relics.

2. How traffic was rerouted or otherwise adjusted to keep it from massing in blockades on either side of the wreck. Sometimes a "back alley" route is available and rusty little rails, accustomed to one freighter of two or three cars, up three days a week and down the other three, now flex under the weight of ninety-ton sleeping cars crawling along at eight miles an hour while the division superintendent prays that the irons don't spread and ditch another "varnished car" limited.

3. Details of the work of reopening the line to traffic. In the wooden-car days, tracks sometimes were cleared by spilling gasoline over the debris and applying a match. That can't be done with all-steel cars. The efforts of the wrecking crews to get the metal mammoths out of the way may be one of the most interesting parts of the story. The crane isn't heavy enough to lift a Pullman lying across the right-of-way, and it will be six hours before a huskier wrecker can arrive. The railroad men don't twiddle their thumbs for six hours. What they do instead makes good reading.

4. Statements of survivors. The "I was in it" side-story ranks high in interest, so long as it is genuine. Little value resides in the statement of a fellow who says, "I was asleep in lower 7 and when I woke up, here I was in the hospital." Speedy in-

interviewing probably will turn up several human interest stories. Here is a man of seventy-four, taking his first train ride, and there a honeymoon couple, separated ruthlessly as the doctors order the groom to the hospital while the weeping bride is told there isn't room enough in the ambulance for her to go along.

5. Famous or prominent names. One of the men in the smoker was the speaker of the state assembly. He is worth strong mention.

6. Dramatic bits as of heroism or cowardice. These will be found only by interviewing, but they give a story humanness as no other material can hope to do. Names and identifications are wanted for the stories of heroism, but they are omitted from accounts of cowardice.

7. Wreck sidelights, often of the freak variety. That woman holding a baby lost her shoes during the excitement, but she clung to the vacuum bottle with the milk for the youngster's next feeding. The car they were in is crumpled, twisted steel, but the glass in the bottle didn't break.

8. Any explanations or statements issued by responsible railroad men. Probably these will come from the general offices, but occasionally an on-the-spot statement will be made.

9. If the wreck involved a freight train, tell something of its cargo. Two cars of cattle were on their way to a Chicago slaughterhouse and now are sidetracked, perhaps for twenty-four hours or longer. Has anyone remembered to water the animals? Two or three cars are tagged as containing perishable goods. Are they shunted to a sidetrack while their cargo rots, or are they snaked back and hustled through on an alternate route?

These suggestions converge into one injunction: covering a wreck means circulating, observing, asking; in brief, wearing out shoe leather. The reporter who sits on a rail fence and remarks "Pretty fair smashup" will write half a column; the one who buzzes around will have three or four columns of copy, every paragraph interesting.

## FIRES

The fire story gives the reporter his half-moment of glory. Already the crowds are swarming and policemen are shouting, "Stay

back there, keep back all of you." The reporter wiggles and pushes his way to the front. "Hey, you," the officer growls, and then, recognizing the reporter, "Okay, Jimmy, but don't get too close."

Where the reporter should go depends upon circumstances, but it can be said confidently that inside the burning building isn't one of the places. A dead reporter can't write a fire story. Often the place to be is near the commanding officers of the fire department to whom the captains and lieutenants make their reports. These top officers know what the situation is in every part of the building. Located anywhere else, the reporter can see only part of the blaze. What is happening on the far side of the building he cannot know.

By waiting for a comparatively free moment, the reporter can question the fire executives with fair hope that they will be able and willing to take the time to answer him. "Why?" is the most important question. "Why did the firemen break the windows on the north side of the building but not those on the west side?" Fire fighting is a systematized business. The executives know the constructions and contents of the principal structures. "Burnham's hardware store" means one sort of attack and "Farnham's dry goods store" means another. Until he finds out why various actions were undertaken, the reporter cannot write a helpful story. The thousands of persons who watch the fire wonder why a hole was chopped in the roof when the blaze was three stories lower. They will refer to the newspaper to find out.

The reporter has six main news currents to watch:

1. Loss of life, injuries. Rumors fill the air. The fire started at noon and by 12:15 the crowd is whispering, "It got four fellows up there on the third floor." The gossips will build a casualty list for a wastebasket fire; the reporter must verify everything he hears or sees about deaths or injuries.

2. Extent of damage. The property owners are all on hand, and so are the insurance men. From them and from the fire executives the reporter can get a detailed estimate of the losses. The property owners boost their figures, since none of them wishes to have an insurance man snort later, "You told the reporters it was \$5,000 loss and now you ask us for \$10,000." The re-

porter uses the most conservative figures, for he knows that a fire is unpredictable. A few years ago fire in a Midwestern penitentiary suffocated more than 300 convicts, yet the property damage was less than \$20,000. The flames and the smoke may suggest "total loss," but the damage may be modest; another fire seems almost trivial, but the water-soaking the store's merchandise endured may send the damage scoting high.

3. Rescues. Almost always these are dramatic and they are probably the most "human" bits in the story. They permit a narrative chronicling, a welcome respite from the catalog of injuries and damage.

4. Lives menaced or property threatened. Sometimes a fire is more interesting in respect to what it might have done than for what it actually did. The bakery shop blaze caused only \$400 direct damage, but it burned electric lines supplying several factories and interrupted the work of 600 employees.

5. Sidelights. Human nature shows itself during a fire. Close watching and quick interviewing discover many excellent angles. The professor escaped handily from the burning apartment. He clutched a brief case in both arms. "Funny what people will drag out," a bystander says. The brief case contained notes of research the professor hopes to complete when he leaves next week for a year of prowling in libraries and laboratories. He saved the notes, but the only clothes he has are a bathrobe and a polo shirt.

6. The cause. The fire chief and the battalion commanders sometimes can tell from the nature of a fire exactly how it started. The causes of other blazes never may be known. The throng watching the fire has its own ideas, passed vehemently from one person to the next and generally quite wrong. "Arson," "firebug," and "to get the insurance" are on everyone's lips. Two or three gaudy, flaming blazes within a fortnight set the whole city to talking of "the firebug." The fire department will be very glad to give the reporter its opinions. It may be that all four buildings were erected forty years ago, when electrical wiring was haphazard, and that the insulations frayed about the same time.

The motion-picture reporter, dashing into the roaring building ahead of the firemen, getting trapped on a roof about to cave in,

and finally rescuing the fire chief, emphatically isn't genuine. Inside the building he would see little, he wouldn't know the firemen's tactics, and probably he would be suffocated. Outside, near the "post of command" where the orders are issued and the information is received, is his place.

Underestimating a fire's tenacity has spoiled many a good story. The classic instance is of a store fire late at night. Apparently it was extinguished and the morning-paper reporters wrote their stories and went home. All, that is, except one man. He had got in the way of a hose and was soggy and dripping. He put his shoes under and his trousers upon an office radiator. While he waited for them to dry, the telephone rang. Fire headquarters was informing the newspapers that the blaze had erupted again. The reporter wriggled into trousers and shoes and dashed over. This time the fire was more unruly; a floor collapsed, carrying nearly a dozen men to death. This reporter was the only one there; his paper issued an extra and scooped the town.

The tip about a fire comes from either the police or the fire department. The police always are informed at once and the reporter on duty at the station finds out from them. In many cities the reporters have a treaty with the fire department to notify the paper of every alarm. In return a couple of copies are dropped each day without charge at fire headquarters. In some larger cities a newspaper has in its office a dial connected with fire headquarters, so that every alarm rung in registers also in the city room. Since many alarms are telephoned, this system is less relied upon than it was a generation ago.

#### CREW REPORTING

A really bad accident will be covered by an entire crew of reporters, including perhaps everyone on the staff, regardless of what his normal duties may be. Sometimes the city editor makes his assignments from the office, directing each reporter to keep in frequent communication with him by telephone. Other times he puts a specified reporter in command. In either case, each staff member is given definite work. The youngest reporter seems slighted and is peevish about it. He is to walk each street in the business district and count the windows broken by the vi-



brations when the gas retort "let go." Why, he'll be three-quarters of a mile away from the interesting stuff. If this is reporting, give him music teaching or selling automobiles. He forgets the value of team work. If he fails to follow his assignment, the whole plan for covering the story has gone smash. Worse, the reporter has marked himself as unreliable; he cannot be counted upon.

When, following his assignment, he comes upon something unexpected and not in the plans, he either gets the information or finds out where it can be obtained, and speedily informs the city editor or the crew chief.

#### OTHER ACCIDENTS

"Think for yourself, sonny," is about as far as directions can be given for covering other kinds of mishaps. Only the genuinely frequent can be classified even partially as to reportorial procedure, and they do not yield completely to such treatment.

This much, however, can be said: accidents of transportation always involve the legal authorities. An airplane accident will be investigated by the Federal and in many instances by the state inspectors. Who these inspectors are, when they are coming, or, if they have come already, what they say should be in the story, despite the fact that generally they say nothing. The coroner or medical examiner probably is the best information source as to the legal aspects of fatal accidents. His investigation will be made as soon as possible, whereas the Federal and state men may be provokingly deliberate. The coroner usually is more talkative and even before he has given his official findings he may summarize his information as to the causes of an accident.

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## 20

# WRITING THE ACCIDENT STORY

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### IT'S THE WAY IT'S WRITTEN

THE ORDINARY ACCIDENT STORY may be one of the most interesting in the paper or one of the flattest. It all hinges on how the story is written. Because the necessary facts are many, inexperienced reporters make their stories drab catalogs of statistics about so many persons taken to the hospital, so many fenders cracked, or so many freight cars thrown into the ditch. Then, suddenly alarmed that their writings are much more about things than about persons, they attempt to dispel the drabness by tricks of diction and pollute their stories into flashy freaks, more likely than not in the worst of bad taste.

The accident story's history now becomes important. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when the grandfathers of the present Associated Press were growing up, editors were ablaze with enthusiasm about the "inverted pyramid" structure for news stories. Allowing a story to be chopped off wherever desired, this handy arrangement was used too eagerly. It got the vital facts at the top, but it required a craftsman to keep the mechanics from showing through. Since many distant stories were of inherently compelling nature, they could withstand the strictures of a partially mechanical form of writing.

So far, so good. Local accident stories were written in the inverted pyramid style, because it made for clarity by starting with a summary of the entire action. The automobile was still primitive. Rural life and farm life were far less mechanized; a man might set his house afire by tipping over a kerosene lamp but he wasn't in danger of electrocuting himself if he tried to

tap an electric light line without turning off the current. A farmer could break an arm by falling off a hay wagon but he had no tractor to tip over and crush him.

Then came the First World War and immediately after it the phenomenal use of the automobile. The mechanizing of America had begun in earnest. At the same time, however, came an emotional backwash from the war. The public's nerves were worn out from the strain of the conflict, and newspapers reflected the intense desire to "have some fun again." Frothy features filled the papers. Yet news coverage, especially of distant affairs, multiplied as the press associations expanded rapidly. Editors realized that where a few years before there had been 5,000 words of copy for every 1,000 words of space, there now were 10,000 words bidding for the skimpy space.

To meet this growing pressure, the word went out, "Write it tight." Also realization grew that many more accidents were being written about than ever before and that many of these accidents were discouragingly alike. A couple of automobiles collided. Change the names of the persons injured and the location of the accident and the story written for Monday's smash would serve for Tuesday's. "Write it tighter," said the editors. The local reporters did so by following the pyramid structure even more devoutly than before. The accident story dwindled to about three paragraphs, all standardized. The facts—the statistics—remained, but the human elements, the bits that were more about persons than about things, vanished. The story became a catalog of injuries; it told that the man whose car had rammed a tree suffered a broken nose, three cuts on his face, two fractured ribs, and mental shock. That he accounted for the accident by explaining that he was trying to wipe a dust speck off his eyeglasses didn't get in the story because the reporter didn't investigate deeply enough to find out about it.

With more and more accidents, written increasingly alike, make-up editors branded them as S. O. S., same old stuff, and consigned them to page 15. That state of mind ran its full course, and here and there reporters began to see in the over-standardized accident story a chance to draw attention to the quality of their writing. They unstandardized the accidents, and

editors found that the public responded. This resuscitation is far from universal, however, and in many offices today an accident chronicle is a tiresome recounting of statistics.

### WHAT DO READERS WISH TO KNOW?

To write accidents effectively, the reporter must prowl into readers' minds and discover what is interesting about a mishap. Ordinarily it isn't the statistics; it will be the extent to which the reader identifies himself with the accident. If he says to himself, "I know that grade crossing, I went over it day before yesterday, and it's a bad one," he will read on. Surely, for as he reads he is imagining how his car might have been tossed sixty feet when the locomotive struck it and how he might almost have been decapitated. When he reads that someone was electrocuted because he stood up in the bathtub and reached for an electric light socket, he warns himself, "I did the same thing last night; I'd better be careful." He will read the rest of the story.

Yet in making an accident recital interesting, "impressionism" cannot crowd out the statistical facts. Thus the chronicle must be double barreled. How shall it be written?

The five-*W* lead, though it should not be used incessantly, often is the best device.

A child and two adults were seriously hurt late last night when their automobile tipped over after being sideswiped on Highway 49, a mile west of Beechams Corners, by a car whose driver was arrested on a charge of operating so as to endanger the public.

This perfectly good summary outlines the event in a single, high-velocity sentence. If the nature of the news fails to attract him, a reader will not bother to scan the second paragraph to find out who was hurt and who was arrested. This form of lead is excellent for the "ordinary" accident, without individual and distinguishing aspects, and particularly when the incident involves no newsworthy names. Within these spheres it remains one of the best ways of beginning the story.

"Names make news; get some names up there at the top," city editors commanded. Reporters obeyed, like this:

Rita Wales, six, and her parents, George D. Wales, 34, salesman for the Andrew Kellett Wholesale Hardware Company, and Maryanne Wales, 31, of 2191 West Wellington Avenue, were seriously injured about 10:45 last night when their automobile tipped over after being sideswiped on Highway 49, a mile west of Beechams Corners, by a car driven by Oscar St. John, 46, a barber at Griswold's shop in the Hotel Warren, who was arrested by County Policeman Henry D. Nevers on a charge of driving so as to endanger the public.

"There," said the reporter, "are your names and their identifications. And it's still a one-sentence lead." "Okay," said the city editor.

But it wasn't okay. The lead had become overloaded almost to incoherence. It was one of the deepest of the "hell-divers." Some reporters even tried to crowd into this all-embracing lead a statement of the injuries of each of the Waleses. The limit had been passed.

#### "PREVIEW" LEADS

From these examples the reporter concludes sensibly that the strict and complete five-*W* lead is workable only when the "Who" and the "What" can be stated compactly. If the lead is too long to be read aloud without gasping, the five-*W* needs modifying. Cut out one, two, or even three of the *W*'s, and hold them until the second paragraph. This gives a "preview" first paragraph, of the sort shown in the first example, without delaying unduly the other essential details.

Using only some of the *W*'s in the lead gives flexibility permitting high emphasis upon any one outstanding news facet. The instances that follow show how:

1. A newsworthy name, and several other names of no especial significance:

Fire Chief Hiram W. Shaw and three other persons were injured this morning when the chief's car skidded, on the way to a small fire, and struck another machine.

Chief Shaw's right arm was broken. The others, all riding in the other car, were John Milstadt, 25, of 119 Allis Street, bruises

and abrasions; Henry T. Potter, 117 Allis Street, face cuts; and Michael Sullivan, 261 Front Street, possible fractured ribs.

The accident happened at. . . .

2. "Ordinary" names linked to an unusual circumstance:

Because of a dispute about which of two roads to take, four motorists are in the hospital today. The driver, confused when his companions gave conflicting directions at the "Y" at Belford Avenue and 12th Street, delayed turning into either street and the car hit a telephone post.

Those injured were. . . .

3. Circumstances too complex for quick explanation:

A three-car collision late last night resulted in the death of a child and the injuring of eight other persons, two of whom are on the danger list at General Hospital.

The child, Henry Osborne, five, of 1991 Summit Avenue, was killed when he was thrown from his father's car when it struck the machine in front, which had slowed suddenly, and then was run over by the third car which smashed into both the other machines. The accident happened at 11:30 on King Street between 11th and 12th Streets.

The injured. . . .

4. A combination story, rolling several accidents into one account. This category splits into two sections: unrelated events, linked simply because each event is an accident, and a series of mishaps, each attributable to some "common denominator."

A lead for the first division of the category:

Four traffic accidents last night and early this morning hurt six persons, three seriously enough to need hospital treatment.

Two persons were injured when a car hit a tree on Shawmut Avenue. A boy was hurt when his bicycle skidded on Summit Street and he fell against a curbstone. A woman pedestrian was knocked down by a coal truck on 12th Street. Two persons were bruised when their car upset on Allis Avenue when a front tire blew out.

A lead for the second division of the category:

Icy streets caused by last night's rain and sudden freeze demoralized traffic this morning and caused nine accidents serious

enough to be reported to police. In all, 16 persons were hurt. Five required hospital treatment.

One accident involved a street railway bus. Three of its 19 passengers were injured, none seriously. Five accidents involved private automobiles, but three of these mishaps caused no personal injuries. Three pedestrians were hurt when they fell on ice-glazed sidewalks.

The complete structure of the roundup story is discussed later in this chapter.

### EVALUATING THE VARIOUS *W*'s

Notice that in each example, a summary characterizes the entire story and acts as a framework on which to fit the five-*W* details withheld from the lead. Because the summaries are different, the leads are rescued from monotonous sameness.

The "How," the "Why," and the "What" are the *W*'s that distinguish one accident from another. Accordingly they are emphasized, with "When" and "Where" subordinated to a few words. Any *W*'s omitted from the lead or mentioned only on the wing will be expanded farther down in the story. Here is a lead in which "what happened" is so overshadowing that the other *W*'s are mentioned with almost disrespectful curtness:

Nine persons were killed last night when the small automobile into which they had crowded failed to make the turn just before the Wellington Road underpass and smashed into the stone abutment. Six of the nine were dead before ambulances arrived and the other three died on the way to the hospital or soon after arrival.

This lead does not mention "Who." "Where," "When," "Why," and "How" are told with utmost word economy. For example, the lead does not say whether the car was going north or south, gives no details as to why it failed to make the curve, and offers no "How" material. All these will be treated later, but they are not good enough for the lead, in which "What" dominates so completely.

To keep this discussion in focus, the full five-*W* lead must be

brought in now to show that it frequently can and should be used:

Conrad Harper, 172 Bell Street, escaped death by inches about 7:15 this morning when a Chicago-bound passenger train tore away the front of his automobile at the Middle Street crossing.

The full five-*W* form is workable until its details pile up and become cumbersome. Then, and only then, should it be dropped for the methods now being discussed.

Though "Where" and "When" often are the "subordinate *W*'s," circumstances sometimes give them a high value. People are on the move so much these days that a considerable number of readers may pass an accident scene before the wreckage is removed. Herded along by officers almost frantic in their struggle to prevent a traffic tieup, these readers know little of the seriousness of the smashup and turn to the newspaper to find out. "Where" and "When" emphasized in the lead help them to see in an instant that, "Here's the story of that accident we passed last night." The reporter adjusts the prominence of "When" and "Where" to fit the individual story. Ordinarily they would be relatively minor in the account of an accident at 3:30 A.M. on a dirt road, but they would be highly important in telling of a smash at 5:30 P.M. on the trunk highway from the city.

How prominently "Who" should be in the lead cannot be ruled upon arbitrarily. The better known a name, or the more names involved, the higher in the story "Who" should come, because a story mentioning someone known to readers is more interesting than one about someone never before heard of. If an accident story mentions only one person, getting the name into the top paragraph is easy, but many stories refer to half a dozen persons. The names, with addresses and other news identifications, take so much space that a paragraph listing them all is overloaded. Hence, the more names, and the more intricate the event to be described, the greater justification for the "characterizing" lead, with the names following in the second or the third paragraph. One example shows the hole in the argument that names inexorably must be in the first paragraph:

Bernard W. Belknap, Halifax, N.S., was hurt last night when his automobile skidded and hit a tree on Belford Avenue near Lake Street.



To readers in Westfield, Mass., Greencastle, Ind., or Tucson, Ariz., Mr. Belknap of Halifax is unknown and a story introduced by mention of his name has no inherent appeal. "What happened" rather than "to whom it happened" is the better news facet. If it is handy to get Mr. Belknap's name into the first paragraph, by all means do so, but if this makes a clumsy opening, hold the name until later.

These leads which characterize an accident, with the "Who" often barred from the opening paragraph, are no contradiction of the earlier injunction that accident accounts should emphasize persons rather than statistics. Several of the leads were as much about persons, regardless of whether they were named at once or later, as about events. In any case, the totality of the story will stress persons above statistics, as later paragraphs will indicate.

#### LINKING READERS WITH THE NEWS

The "Who" often is given in partial form in the top paragraph, in order to get as soon as possible to the question, "Did I know him?" First, a lead with too little "Who":

Two boys drowned and one was rescued last night after their canoe had overturned on Lake Wyocha.

This is so compact that it can admit more "Who" material:

Two *local* boys drowned and a third was rescued last night after their canoe had overturned on Lake Wyocha.

Two *local high-school* boys drowned and a third was rescued last night after their canoe had overturned on Lake Wyocha.

Two *local high-school football players* drowned and a third was rescued last night after their canoe had overturned on Lake Wyocha.

Two *local* boys, *John Francis* and *Raymond Erdahl*, drowned and a third, *Thomas Stimson*, was rescued last night after their canoe overturned on Lake Wyocha.

Of these leads, the one giving the names probably is the best. The names, even though unidentified and unexplained, will answer the "Did I know them?" query of many readers. Had the names been common ones, such as William O'Brien, John Brown,

and Henry Smith, it would have been necessary to accompany them with ages and addresses so that readers might know immediately whether the drowned O'Brien was the one they knew. If completing the identification takes the crackle out of the lead, a nameless opening probably is better. The first example that follows shows the usual limit to which identification can be pushed without ruining completely the easy reading of the paragraph and the second shows a lead sunk by too much identifying material:

John Francis, 18, 612 Connecticut Street, and Raymond Erdahl, 17, 912 Sherman Avenue, drowned and Thomas Stimson, 18, 515 Ridgewood Street, was rescued last night after their canoe overturned on Lake Wyocha.

John Francis, 18, 612 Connecticut Street, a senior at Garfield High School and for three years a regular on both its football and basketball teams, and Raymond Erdahl, 17, 192 Sherman Avenue, only child of Assistant Postmaster and Mrs. William W. Erdahl, drowned and Thomas Stimson, 18, 515 Ridgewood Street, who last week received notice of his appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., was rescued last night after their canoe overturned on Lake Wyocha.

The second lead identifies the youths so completely that every reader has a complete answer to the query, "Did I know them?" but the identifying is so ponderous that the action words "drowned" and "was rescued" are utterly swamped in the sea of detail.

When a story is notably interesting to a particular group of readers, a "signboard" to that effect can be written into the opening paragraph:

Two *Brookfield* boys drowned and an *Adamsville* youth was rescued last night after their canoe overturned on Lake Wyocha.

In water stories the "Where" requires pinning down, since many waters are large enough that an unelaborated mention gives readers a vague concept of the geography. "When their canoe overturned on Lake Wyocha" is too indefinite if Wyocha has a forty-mile shoreline. Many readers wish to know "did it happen near our summer place?" or "did it happen near the place we go fishing?" Accordingly the reporter gets high into the story such

an elaboration as "a quarter of a mile offshore from Mallett's Bay on the south side of the lake."

### THE FIRE STORY W's

"Where" and "When" are imperatives for the lead to a fire story, because they are the first questions readers ask when they see a fire headline. "I heard the sirens and I wondered where the fire was."

The easiest way of telling "Where" often is unsuccessful. Says the lead, "Fire late last night did an estimated \$5,000 damage to the business block at 1632 Grand Avenue." Everyone knows where Grand Avenue is, but many indeed cannot place "1632 Grand Avenue" within four or five blocks of its rightful spot. Even prominent locations in the business district often are little known by their street numbers. A more complete identification is desirable, such as "65 Elm Street, directly across the street from Hotel Warren" or "212 Oak Street, half a block beyond the Power and Light Company building." Venerable buildings often have had more than one name and the older residents still refer to them by titles of twenty-five or thirty years ago. For the benefit of the many older readers, give the building both its present and its former name, as "The Central Building, formerly the Cranston Block, at 305 Sauk Street."

The first two requisites of a fire story lead are to tell whether anyone was killed or hurt and then give a definite concept of the seriousness of the blaze. Regardless of how high the property damage and how inconspicuous the one man who was suffocated, loss of life is mentioned before property damage. "One man was burned to death when a \$200,000 fire destroyed the Granger Lumber Company yards on Cypress Street early this morning," the lead begins. The one man may have been a tramp huddling for the night on a pile of gunnysacks, but he is, properly, more important than the dollar value of the fire. In this seeming naïveté, the newspaper reaffirms the Pythagorean truth, unchanged through the ages but sometimes in danger of being forgotten, that "man is the measure of all things." It will be a melancholy day when the newspaper takes the view that property is more important than life.

Showing in the lead the gravity of a fire exposes a reporter to a temptation that few are adroit enough to resist. Routine writing refers to "damage estimated at \$150,000," but how many readers know how much property must be destroyed to make such a loss? If the Hotel Warren burned, would the loss be \$100,000 or \$1,000,000? Is the city hall a \$40,000 or a \$400,000 structure? The public doesn't know. Thirty years ago, a dollar sign and three or four zeros automatically indicated "lots of money" but the public today talks in terms of millions and billions. The First World War taught Americans to think of thousands of dollars as trivial, and the governmental measures adopted during the depression of the early 1930's increased readers' familiarity with millions and hundreds of millions. Though his own funds be less than \$3.50, the ordinary reader thinks of a governmental item of \$250,000 as "dinky." Hence, when he reads a fire story mentioning \$50,000 or \$100,000 loss, it does not impress him as it would have impressed his grandfather, or even his father. The estimated damage should remain in the lead, but not necessarily at the top. Find an expression that can be more easily visualized than can money.

"Fire that menaced an entire business block" will be usable except in a community where "block" customarily refers to a single building rather than to all the buildings on the four streets forming a rectangle.

"A blaze that roared for five hours" suggests an enormity that readers can comprehend quickly. "A fire so hot that it scorched paint on buildings half a block away" will tell readers that the blaze was worse than average.

Striving for vivid phrasings, a reporter wracks the language. He devises wordings so terrible that their only hope for posterity is in the horrible-example list in some textbook. Or, at the other end of the beam, the reporter rings in a tottering cliché that even the leisurely news writers of 1820 would have rejected as outworn.

Belching billows of bilious smoke. . . .

The great red demon, Fire, swooped down upon the city this morning and poured his hot, flaming breath. . . .

If a fire was as bad as all that, the ordinary reaches of the language will convey the idea adequately. If it wasn't that bad, don't strain the rhetoric in trying to present as a conflagration what was only a routine blaze that kept the firemen busy less than twelve minutes.

The word "conflagration" is to be used sparingly. A city is unusual if it has such a fire once a decade. A fire isn't a conflagration until it sweeps a wide area. If three or four blocks are razed, the fire approaches conflagration size.

Phrasings such as "two-alarm fire" and "general-alarm blaze" vary in their power from city to city and sometimes within one city. The Junctionville chief has a tearfully inadequate department with which to protect a community of flimsy, wooden buildings. His policy is to ring a second alarm whenever the wind is blowing. Fires that in Middleburg would be "trifling" are given two-alarms in his town. In many cities, fires in certain areas, such as the warehouse district, automatically are two-alarm calls, for the reason that a blaze out of control in such a region easily might become a conflagration and the department overemphasizes each alarm until its caution has been demonstrated as needless. Almost anywhere, a call from a lumber yard or a paint store would be doubled by the firemen into two alarms.

"General-alarm fires" are as rare as the department can keep them, because they are an admission that the blaze was out of control and it was necessary to leave the rest of the city unprotected in order to fight this one fire. Insurance companies are sensitive about general alarms; if they come too often, the insurance rates go up. The fire department has no worse publicity than that. The firemen have another reason for disliking general alarms; the more apparatus is called to one spot, the greater the danger will be at a second fire to which few men and little equipment can be sent. Leaving much or all of a city unprotected is done only *in extremis*.

Fire stories sometimes call for weasel wording. The Huffer Building is crackling noisily, but the edition has to go. The blaze is too young for the reporter to conjecture whether the firemen can save the building. Therefore he writes that "fire

*swept* the Huffer Building” or that “fire this afternoon *raged* in the Huffer Building.” A few years ago this subvention of rhetoric was more frequent than it is today; city editors of day-before-yesterday had a prejudice, somewhat erratic, against admitting that the paper didn’t know how an action would end. “We go to press at 3:15,” they argued, “but many of our readers don’t get the paper until 5:30. By that time it will be known whether the fire destroyed the building. We look asleep if we carry a ‘perhaps’ story. Write it so it’ll fit whichever way the fire turns out.”

Today, cheerily, this frame of mind has faded somewhat, and the city editor prefers the candor of a frank statement that “at press time it was uncertain whether the building could be saved.”

#### BE SPECIFIC

Whatever the accident, a generalized statement is a poor bid for vividness. “Bravery,” “presence of mind,” and “quick action” are weak phrasings for the top of a lead, because they cannot be visualized:

A policemen’s presence of mind this morning kept seven-year-old Ralph Whipple from drowning in Lake Frontenac.

This lead may mean so many things that as a result it means nothing. Tell how the policeman displayed the presence of mind:

Because he took the time to run to a garage and get an old inner tube inflated for use as a life preserver, a policeman who could not swim kept Ralph Whipple, seven, from drowning this morning in Lake Frontenac.

The quest for vividness has two side roads that lead to the swamp of failure, because each violates good taste. The first is an attempt to be funny about an action inherently serious or distressing:

There won’t be any more squawking at 1119 Sheridan Street to annoy the neighbors. It wasn’t much of a fire, did less than \$25 damage, but it made smoke enough to suffocate the pet parrot of Mrs. William Abernathy.

A parrot may be an unusual pet, but to Mrs. Abernathy the bird well may have been as cherished as is the average burgher's collie dog or a five-year-old's white kitten.

The other offense against good taste comes in trying to create tragedy out of a happening not bad enough to be tragic. "We haven't had a good tear-jerker for weeks. I'll needle this one." Please don't.

Silence and gloom hang like a pall at the house of William Wayne, 191 Lisbon Street. For three weeks Wayne got home early from his job and worked until dark building a garage.

Last night as he munched a cold chop and potatoes soggy from waiting too long, he glanced out the kitchen window. To his horror, he saw a tongue of red flame curl up the side of his new garage, which he had expected to complete tonight. As if paralyzed, he sat transfixed in his chair. Then he sprang to his feet and rushed to the telephone. The firemen arrived within a few minutes, but the garage was blazing too much for them to save it.

As they left, Wayne stood, slouch shouldered and glum, and looked at the leering ashes, all that was left of three weeks of work.

William Wayne will resent this writing; it portrays him as a man of such slight emotional durability that he is overcome by what after all is not a blighting loss. The generality of readers will resent such a writing, for it tries to make them weep but its subject is not sufficiently lachrymose.

One accident in 9,000 or 10,000 is humorous. The fat in which doughnuts are cooking blazes, but the housewife puts out the flames in a moment. Then she opens the kitchen door to air out the room. A neighbor sees wisps of smoke and telephones the firemen. The doughnut cooker is aghast when rubber-booted firemen rush in and ask where the blaze is. They're angry at being called needlessly, but a dozen of the doughnuts soothe them. Such an episode would make a nicely humorous story.

#### IN THE LINE OF DUTY

It may seem unfair and discriminatory, but the death of a fireman, policeman, railroad man, airplane pilot, bus driver, or sailor is less newsworthy than the death of a civilian or of a passenger. His job demands that a fireman take risks; if the

risks finally catch up with him, it is unfortunate but more or less to be expected. "All in the line of duty." The householder suffocated by smoke is stronger news; his daily occupation did not expose him to that peril and his death from this unexpected danger is therefore more distressing than that of the fireman.

Accident leads, accordingly, mention the civilians and the passengers before they mention the officers and the crew members. This necessity sometimes is an emotional strain upon the reporter. Jimmy Dugan, the cop, is dead—genial Jimmy who always had a cheery word for everyone. He died vainly trying to save some runty kid from drowning. The reporter knew and liked Dugan; he never before heard of the kid. He wishes to write the story about Dugan, but the mores say "No." Unless circumstances are extraordinary, the story is about the youngster. Dugan is prominent, but in second place.

#### THE CASUALTY LIST

Whatever the nature of the lead, the casualty list follows it at once. This is sound psychology. Readers wish to know in one glance what happened, but the instant they find out they ask, "Did I know any of the people?" The casualty list, accordingly, is the next item. Now and then a paper runs the casualties first, immediately after the headline, on the idea that the headline has summarized "what happened" and the query, "Did I know them?" should be answered before the headline material is repeated in the lead. Frequently a newspaper "splits the difference" by giving a "flash" or skeleton lead, then the casualty list, and after that completing the lead. Thus:

Three persons were killed last night when fire destroyed the Downing Apartments, 21 California Street.

They were:

Thomas Ardman, 37, a floorwalker at the Boston Store.

Henrietta Masters, 24, stenographer in the Cartwright insurance agency.

John D. Winters, 52, meat cutter for the Maher Grocery Company.

Only nine persons were in the three-story, six-apartment wooden building when the fire was discovered at 9:45. The six who escaped were all on the first and second floors. The three who



were killed lived on the third floor and were trapped when a jet of furnace-hot air swept up the stairway as they were trying to reach the ground floor.

When to split the lead and when to give it uninterrupted is a matter of judgment. If the casualty list is long, or if some of its members were well known, a "flash" lead often is preferable. This is particularly the case when the lead must run into three, four, or five paragraphs.

Many papers run the casualty list in distinctive typography, sometimes in larger type and sometimes in the same size type as the rest of the story but in boldface. The directions for this treatment are written into the story by the copy editor, who knows what the details of the display are to be, rather than by the reporter, who often is uninformed.

The casualty list gives the killed first and then the injured. The much preferred procedure is to paragraph each name:

The injured:

John S. Adams, 41, 2009 Wright Street; fractured skull, broken right arm, on the danger list.

William D. Hendrickson, 28, Oakfield; brain concussion, probable broken ribs.

Mrs. Sarah Lewis, 25, 911 Cornell Avenue; head and face cuts.

James C. Sullivan, 40, 218 Randolph Road; bruises and cuts.

This treatment gives each name more prominence, and has the added advantage of easier handling if the list must be revised. Later information adds Hendrickson's name to those on the hospital's danger list. When each name is in a separate paragraph, the change can be made merely by "pulling" and revising the Hendrickson paragraph. If, however, the names have been strung together into one paragraph, it will be necessary to reset twelve, fifteen, or twenty lines of type in order to amend a statement near the top of the paragraph.

Whatever qualifications the hospital makes in describing injuries are to be observed scrupulously. "Probable fractured skull," the doctor says. "Phuff," the reporter sniffs. "I saw that fellow; his head's half mashed in. Of course he has a fractured skull. Devil take this 'probable' business." Eventually he will

learn that skulls can be amazingly resistant and that some injuries that "must" be fatal aren't. Ignoring the hospital qualifications may bring effective reprisal. "You seem to know more about these things than we do," a doctor comments acidly. "Last time I told you a man had a probable fractured skull you said he had multiple fractures. He didn't. If you're such a blistering good diagnostician, come down and look at this man yourself and figure out what's wrong with him." Clunk, the telephone receiver drops into its cradle.

A casualty list must be kept up to date. Changes can occur within a few minutes. The man who at 10:45 was "resting comfortably" may be dead at 11:45, and the woman who at 2 o'clock was in "serious condition" by 3 o'clock may be showing considerable gain.

#### STRUCTURE AFTER THE LEAD

Because later information changes so many accident stories, their writing must be meticulously realistic, so that revisions can be made quickly and without throwing away large chunks of type. The story, therefore, is split into short paragraphs, so that an amendment will affect only six or eight lines of type rather than sixteen or eighteen. To obtain these short blocks, the action is divided so that each phase or aspect has a separate paragraph and transitions are avoided. Compare these specimens:

The firemen were hampered because both hydrants on the Elm Avenue side of the building were frozen.

A line of hose, stretched 500 feet to the hydrant at the corner of Elm and Varney Avenues, burst.

Firemen thawed the two frozen hydrants, which were put into use about 11:35.

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Then a change comes; another hose line bursts and the reference must be revised to read, "This was the first hose that broke." In the upper, short-paragraph version only two lines of type

need be recast; in the other, more than twice as much must be done over.

Transitions are tabu unless coherence makes them inescapable. They link paragraphs too closely. Especially if it is a late story and big, the composing room may be frantic. The foreman snips stories into short bits so that more typesetters can work on them at the same time. When the resultant fragments of type reach the assembly table, they are in random sequence. If the minutes have dwindled to twenty-five seconds each, the type may not be sorted out but may be dumped into the page in whatever order the fragments happen to be grabbed. This rough and tumble treatment isn't a daily occurrence, but it happens often enough to be a perpetual threat. If the paragraphs are handcuffed together by "Meanwhile," "At the same time," "The next step," and similar phrasings, the juggling of paragraph order will reduce a story into gibberish. Sometimes transitions are inescapable; use them then and only then.

The accident story may have one of three structures: chronological, reverse chronology, or dwindling-interest. One lead will suffice for all three methods:

Lawrence W. Burke, 61 Nashua Street, escaped death by inches about 7:15 this morning when the locomotive of the Boston Limited destroyed his automobile at the Chocorua Street crossing. Burke received only minor cuts and scratches on his face and hands and did not require hospital treatment.

Look now at the chronological method:

Burke approached the crossing at a speed he later estimated at 30 miles an hour. Because of the fog, he did not see the flashing of the warning signal until he was within 30 feet. Then he applied his brakes, but his car skidded ahead on the icy road.

When he saw that he could not stop, he tried to steer into the ditch, Burke said, but his car continued to slide forward. He opened the door on his left and half jumped, half tumbled out of the coupe just as it reached the tracks.

The locomotive hit the car in the middle, on the driver's side, and tossed it 35 feet. It landed against a telegraph pole. Burke meanwhile rolled away from the track, though he was so close that steam from the locomotive cylinder swished against his face.

This order, though rarely the most dramatic, is coherent and easy to follow. It is easy to write, particularly when the reporter is sprinting with the clock. Against the chronological structure is its leveling off of details. The most interesting and important facets frequently come in the middle of a story or near the end and can be given a semblance of emphasis only by writing the earlier details very tightly and then expanding mightily the three or four most deserving bits.

Second is the reverse chronology, founded on the often but not inevitably true thesis that the final action in a series is the decisive element:

The locomotive hit the car in the middle, on the driver's side, and tossed it 35 feet. Burke, who jumped a moment before the collision, rolled away from the track, though he was so close that steam from the locomotive cylinder swished against his face. His car was thrown against a telegraph pole.

Burke half jumped, half tumbled from his car when he saw that he could not stop it, *because of the icy road*. He tried to steer into the ditch, but the coupe continued to slide forward. He opened the door on his left and got out just as the car slid on to the track.

Because of the fog, Burke said, he did not see the flashing of the warning signal until he was within 30 feet of the crossing, which he approached at about 30 miles an hour. When he applied his brakes, the car did not respond.

This system will not work well if any early element approaches the decisive. As the second paragraph shows in the wording "because of the icy road," this structure must be watched so that necessary explanations can be written in soon enough. In the chronological version, the "icy road" matter came naturally near the start; in the reverse version it had to be plucked out of its normal location, the start of the skid, and pushed ahead to show more promptly why Burke's machine would not behave. Reverse chronology is hard to write. It is successful when the ultimate and penultimate actions genuinely are decisive and when the reporter has time enough to write with true care.

The dwindling-importance system disregards chronology:

Half jumping and half falling from his coupe as it skidded on to the track, Burke fell to the ground just as the locomotive hit his

car. Though he rolled away from the track, he was so near that steam from the locomotive cylinder swished against his face.

Burke estimated his speed as he approached the crossing at about 30 miles an hour. He said the fog kept him from seeing the flashing of the warning signal until he was within 30 feet. He then applied his brakes but without effect, because of the icy road.

When he was unable to stop his car, Burke tried to steer into the ditch but the machine slid on forward. The locomotive tossed it 35 feet and it landed against a telegraph pole.

This is the preferred system. It requires competent writing or it will be incoherent. Back of that competent writing must be a clear and complete analysis of the action. The reporter "a mite uncertain" about what happened will make a mess of this structure. He had better stick to the chronological.

The order in which he listed the high spots of the action in the lead will help the reporter when he presents the details in the dwindling-interest structure. The sequence in the lead should be followed in the detailed treatment. The reader has the lead as a framework; the details come in the order of their foreshadowing and they therefore are easy to tack into place on the framework. With care and planning, even a highly intricate action can be presented in the dwindling-interest arrangement. It is a mark of the seasoned reporter. But avoid slapdash writing; the result will be half way between hash and stew.

These three methods are, basically, a use of the "block structure" discussed in other chapters. In the Burke story, the action was divided into blocks, and each one given completely, as an entity. The sequence, of course, depended upon the choice of chronological, reverse chronology, or dwindling-interest procedure.

Because the Burke lead was so compact that it gave virtually no details, it had no influence upon the later structure. Where a lead does introduce details, or where it is several paragraphs long, the elaboration of the details follows the order of their mention in the lead. Thus, each detail being listed numerically for later reference:

*(Block 1: The lead)*

Four passengers and the driver were injured this morning at about 7:35 when an eastbound Killington Street bus (1)skidded

47 feet coming down Pico Street hill and (2) overturned after (3) sideswiping a parked car. (4) All of the injured were taken to Proctor Memorial Hospital where their condition was described at noon as "out of danger."

(Block 2: *The casualty list*)

The injured:

Thomas Artmann, 35, a barber, 216 Clarendon Street, broken right arm; face lacerations.

Miss Mabel King, 22, a stenographer, 9 Wallingford Avenue, possible internal injuries; face lacerations.

William J. Dennis, 46, the bus driver, 108 Sherburne Road, broken left leg; possible sprained back.

Arthur D. Petersen, 28, truck driver, 99 Poultney Street, head and back injuries, extent yet undetermined.

William B. Sands, 37, store clerk, 316 Brandon Street, possible sprained back; bruises.

(Block 3: *The catch-all*)

The bus had only four passengers. The police ambulance took the injured to the hospital. Pico Street traffic was blocked for nearly an hour by the overturned bus, which was finally righted and towed to the company garage on Shrewsbury Street.

(Block 4: *Elaboration of details in the lead*)

1. The bus was half way down the block-long Pico Street hill when it went out of control and skidded sideways. From tire marks on the icy street, police recorded the skid as 47 feet. Dennis, the driver, said at the hospital that he started down the hill in second gear and that he was going only about ten miles an hour when the bus began to skid.

"I tried to straighten her out," he said, "but I couldn't get any traction."

2. After sliding sideways for the greater part of the skid, the bus upset, apparently when it hit an uneven spot in the highway. It fell over on its right side. Although the windows did not shatter, the passengers were cut by various knobs and projections on the bus equipment. Passers-by helped the passengers out of the emergency door at the rear and called the police ambulance.

3. Before it overturned, the bus struck a parked car, owned by Henry H. Hornell, 905 Mendon Avenue. The car, struck in the middle by the front of the bus, was pushed up on the sidewalk. Damage to it included a twisted frame. The car was towed to Elroy's garage on New Haven Street.

4. The five injured persons were taken to the hospital in one trip by the police ambulance. The ambulance skidded twice in

(Block 5: Minor items mentioned in neither lead nor catch-all)

Dennis has been a driver for the bus company for 11 years. Company officials said this was his first accident of more than routine nature. The bus, No. 7, is of the 24-seat size.

Company officials said that they would make only a preliminary investigation today and would wait until the injured were out of the hospital before starting a more complete inquiry. At the local office of the state public utilities department, it was said that a comprehensive investigation would wait until the injured were better able to testify.

Pico Street hill receives "special" sanding, Street Commissioner Paul Albright said this morning. He explained that a sand crew visits the hill at least four times every 24 hours. The hill was sanded between 6:00 and 6:30 this morning, he said.

### SIMULTANEOUS ACTIONS

Describing concurrent actions can be difficult. The reporter has two methods. The first breaks the rule calling for paragraphs so individual that they remain coherent even if printed in a misplaced sequence. This method is to write a paragraph summarizing the various simultaneous actions, and then to describe each event in more detail in a separate paragraph, these paragraphs coming in the order of their forecasting in the summary:

The Jenness boat capsized half a mile from shore at almost the same time that Harper's motorboat was stalled by engine trouble. These two accidents delayed rescue efforts at least 20 minutes.

Driven from his course by the high wind, Jenness attempted to turn his craft to head directly into the wind. He had made about half the turn when a large wave struck him broadside and overturned his boat. He swam to the capsized boat and clung to it. The wind finally blew his boat near enough the shore for him to swim to land.

Harper's boat, meanwhile, was half way across the lake when the engine went dead because of a loose ignition wire. Harper tightened the wire, but the engine flooded with gasoline when he tried to start it again and at least ten minutes more passed before he could get the motor to fire.

The other method is to combine the actions into a single paragraph, perhaps of cross-country length. Which procedure is better is for the reporter to determine.

Gruesome details should be herded into one section of the story, as near the end as possible, rather than diffused throughout. Concentrating them, the reporter protects nervous readers from a series of assaults upon their emotions.

### ROUNDUP STORIES

The roundup, grouping a series of accidents into one comprehensive story, demands that the body structure present the accidents in the sequence given in the lead:

Four persons were hurt in traffic accidents last night and this morning. Two were injured in a car-and-truck collision on Sherman Avenue, a boy was hurt when his bicycle ran into a car stopped for a traffic light, and a woman pedestrian was struck by a motorcycle.

The body of the story will describe these accidents in the same order in which they were listed in the lead.

When one accident is much more newsworthy than the others, the reporter has a choice of structures. The first goes in this wise:

Block 1: Usually one paragraph; summary of the most newsworthy accident.

Block 2: Usually one paragraph; summary of the other accidents.

Block 3: As many paragraphs as needed; details of the lead accident.

Block 4: As many paragraphs as needed; details of the other accidents, in the same order as their mention in Block 2.

The other arrangement is:

Block 1: Usually one paragraph; summary of all the accidents with the lead accident mentioned first.

Block 2: As many paragraphs as called for; details of the lead accident.

Block 3: As long as may be needed; details of the lesser accidents, in the order of mention in Block 1.

Block 1 sometimes may read in this fashion:



Alderman John Vance of Ward 3 was seriously hurt last night when his automobile smashed into a parked car on Adams Terrace, and six other persons were injured in other traffic accidents.

Since Block 1 has not mentioned specifically any of the other mishaps, their later detailing can be in the order of descending interest rather than in any lead-paragraph sequence.

The cliché does more than any other factor to make accident stories deadly alike. Let escapes be other than "narrow," let smoke issue otherwise than as "belching," and let the lake's waters be other than "angry." And remember, pray, that only those accidents involving two or more *moving* vehicles are "collisions." The bromides seem to run in cycles; at the moment, every train that is wrecked is a "crack" train. Some day the dinky on the Sleepy Hollow branch line, average speed fourteen miles an hour, will be derailed and a heedless reporter will term it a "crack train." *Editor & Publisher* will put the boner into the Short Takes column and city editors will do some cracking of a different sort. Hasten the day!

Where does background come into an accident story? Background is largely an explaining that this new accident is one of a series or that it has certain distinctive elements. If the background can be handled briefly, often it is run immediately after the casualty list, except when that list follows a flash or interrupted lead. If background cannot be cut down so much, it is split, a "lead background" following the casualty list and the details of the background coming at the end of the story. When the background is long, it sometimes is offered as a separate story, adjoining the main story on the page.

Making the accident story interesting is principally a matter of finding out its details. A flash or two of dialog often will do it. Compare these versions, the first taken from a newspaper and the other diluted from it:

"I didn't know where the devil I was going," Emanon told the sheriff. "I said I'd prove the car would do 90, and if it hadn't been for that curve we'd have hit 100. Sure, we were drunk. All of us."

Emanon told the sheriff that he set out to prove that his car was capable of 90 miles an hour and that, if it had not been for

the curve, he could have pushed it to 100 miles an hour. He said he did not know where he was going, and that everyone in the party was intoxicated.

The first version has the breath of life; the second is lusterless.

Since some stories permit little if any dialog, a bringing forward of interesting details is the surest way of intensifying the writing. It is of no importance that this fire is the third successive blaze at which Hoseman Joe Bailey has been injured, but this sidelight makes the story more authoritative. It shows readers that the reporter dug deep and that, though he wrote only 250 words, those words were chosen from a possible 1,500 or 2,000. Many readers saw all or part of the event. They read the story in large measure to learn what the reporter saw that they missed. "Remember the red car? We thought it was the one that hit the old man, but the paper says it was the car he got out of when he started to walk across the road. Remember, I told you it was funny it didn't have a dented radiator or a broken headlight."

## SECOND-DAY STORIES

Many accidents are news for more than one day. Determination of their causes and changes in the casualty list keep them alive for days, occasionally for weeks or months. However prominently the first-day chronicle was displayed, the later accounts require a summary of the original story, as:

Four persons were injured in the accident, which happened Saturday on Highway 28 near Ridgefield, when a Black and Orange bus rolled down a banking after colliding with a truck. The bus driver, Harry Harnack, Chicago, is at liberty under \$1,000 bond on a charge of negligent driving.

This tie-in usually follows immediately after the lead and is placed high in the story for the benefit of readers who missed the first-day news. The longer the story lives, the shorter the tie-in can be, until finally it is only a subordinate clause, spliced deftly into the lead paragraph.

It should not dwindle as much as did one follow story of the wrecking of a streamliner, luxury train. A score of persons were

killed and the wreck seemed conclusively sabotage, which, next to the length of the casualty list, was the high spot of the news. Yet, less than a week later a follow story omitted mention of the sabotage aspect. A reader who missed the earlier stories would have said, "Humph, so one of those go-like-the-devils finally went too fast. I always said that would happen sooner or later."

COURT NEWS

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## THE ARISTOCRAT

THE PRINCE, professionally the courts reporter, surveys the snowstorm nonchalantly. "Frightful, isn't it?" he asks of no one in particular. Other reporters must plow through the swirling snow that drives down their ankles and half-freezes their feet. Heads lowered, they will push against the blade-sharp wind. With six or eight assignments to cover, each of them will have a full dose of weather before the day is ended.

Not so the Prince. Shortly before 10 o'clock he will buck the snow for three blocks; then he will be at the county building, where he will sit in warm relaxation and watch the news parade before him. It will be interesting news, showing the full march of humanity. Brutality and tragedy will be enacted before him. Levity, though unintentional, will give him a chuckle. If he wishes mental gymnastics, he will listen to cases so involved that even the lawyers must struggle to understand them.

The Prince—all his colleagues know him as Seth—has an assignment at once easy and difficult. Its ease lies in the fact that he has available the court records if his own notes of a case should be inadequate. The difficulty lies in following and then describing legal minutiae of extreme intricacy. Describing them is perpetually hard, for they must be translated so that readers who know or understand neither *mittimus* nor *mandamus* can comprehend. He must make this simplification without losing the shades of significance which may decide a case.

Despite its enormous complexity, the system of courts boils down to a few guiding practices and principles. The complexity

comes less from the number of these practices and principles than from the combinations and modifications they assume in adapting to fit various cases and questions.

Law itself is merely a "pattern of conduct," supported and enforced by the power of "the state." The power of "the state" may be of limited or of extensive scope. Thus the validity of a municipal ordinance, enacted by a city council, is limited to one city; the reach of a statute engrossed by a state legislature is restricted to one state; and only a law passed by the national Congress is applicable anywhere in the nation.

The law splits into two classes: statutory, or "formal," and common, or "informal," law. Statutory law is, generally speaking, the law officially enacted by a legislative body, such as a city council or a state legislature. It is inscribed in the official records or compilations of the work of that legislative body and remains in effect until formally revoked, or until modified or nullified by some official legal action. Common law is, broadly, the body of decisions and rulings made by judges who, in cases in which statutory law was unavailable to guide them, reached their decisions wholly or partly by settling the cases in conformity to the established practices and customs of the community, for all that these customs and practices owe their establishment to general observance rather than to any formal, legal enactments.

A second division is necessary, and the law divides into criminal and civil law. Criminal law is concerned with acts which the state regards as committed against the interests of "the people," and therefore subject to punishment. A slaying is so contrary to the interests and the welfare of "the people" that the law provides punishment for the offense. Civil law is concerned with the individual, or individuals, suffering from some action, rather than with "the people" in the aggregate. A customer commits no crime against "the people" when he neglects to pay his grocery bill, but he has so damaged the grocer that the law provides machinery whereby the tradesman can obtain "relief" or "satisfaction."

Civil law breaks into two general fields: common law and equity. Relief given by common law usually is in the form of monetary recompense or "damages," and relief given in equity

consists of a court order that the person or persons complained of shall discontinue doing certain things or shall perform stipulated acts. The grocer who wishes to enforce payment of an overdue bill of \$250 generally acts through the common law; the landowner who wishes to prevent a neighbor from walking across his choice flower-bed acts through an equity case.

Consider first the criminal law, which goes far beyond the courts and into the question of seizing or arresting a person accused of an offense. Offenses separate into two groups, whose dividing line differs in various states. The more serious offenses, for which the heavier penalties are inflicted, are "felonies" and the lesser offenses, punishable by a small fine or a brief stay in jail, are "misdemeanors."

Anyone caught in a crime, whether felony or misdemeanor, can be arrested on the spot by any person, private citizen or law officer. No authority or order from a court or judge is required to make this arrest legal. Anyone, officer or citizen, may arrest a person suspected of a felony, even though the arrest is not made during the commission of the crime. An arrest for a murder committed six months earlier would be an example.

If the offense is a misdemeanor, the arrest, whether by officer or citizen, must be made while the offense is taking place. If made at any other time, the arrest must be authorized by a court order, or "warrant." A warrant is a written order, issued by a "magistrate" or presiding officer of a court, or, sometimes, by a "clerk of courts," directing an officer to take the person named in the order into custody and bring him before the court.

A warrant is issued after a "sworn complaint" has been presented to the court, accusing the person against whom the warrant is requested, of the specified offense. The complaint may be presented by anyone, citizen or officer.

A variety of order-for-arrest is the "bench warrant," issued after a person has been "indicted" by a grand jury or has been accused in an "information" presented by the "state's attorney" or the "district" or "prosecuting" attorney.

A grand jury is a group of persons—the number varies with different states—called to hear purported evidence and to decide whether it seems substantial enough to justify arresting and trying

specified persons. The grand jury, which acts in closed or secret session, may limit itself to accusations presented to it or may on its own authority vote accusations. It acts only in cases of felonies. Some states have abolished the grand jury as cumbersome and costly; in states where it is retained, grand jury consent is necessary before a person can be tried on a felony charge. The grand jury hears only one side of the case, that of the officers or other persons who believe a certain individual to be guilty, and decides whether that belief seems well enough established to warrant trying the individual. The grand jury's action is not in the slightest sense a finding that the individual is guilty; it is nothing more than a decision that enough doubt of his innocence exists to make it desirable to investigate further. The persons acted against may or may not be under arrest at the time of the grand jury's sitting.

If the grand jury decides to "indict" an individual, it issues an "indictment" or "true bill." If it decides against indicting, it reports "No bill" or "Not a true bill."

An "information" is a sworn complaint made by the state's attorney in misdemeanor cases, or in felonies in states where there is no grand jury. It is a formal accusation, presented to a magistrate as justification for the accompanying request for a warrant. A "complaint" is a written accusation sworn by a private citizen and applies to less serious offenses. A citizen wishing to have another citizen arrested would swear to a complaint, which would form the basis for the warrant issued by a judge.

#### TWO CHANCES FOR THE ACCUSED

The American concept is that a person is innocent until the state has proved the accusation against him. The several courts are graduated as to the seriousness of the cases they may try. Courts at the bottom of the scale do not have the right to try a person for a major crime, for which the penalty would be a long imprisonment. The law commands that an arrested person be brought into court "forthwith," that is, speedily. Often the most available court will not have the authority, or "jurisdiction," to try so serious a case. It will, however, conduct a "preliminary examination" or "hearing," somewhat parallel to a grand jury

sitting, and will decide whether the purported evidence is so thin that the accused should not be called upon to undergo the ordeal of a trial, in which case the accused is released, or whether the evidence is strong enough to justify a trial, in which case the accused is held for further action, either by a court having jurisdiction or by the grand jury.

If the arrest follows a grand jury indictment or an information by the state's attorney, the preliminary hearing—which can include introduction of testimony by witnesses—decides only whether the accused shall remain in jail to await trial or shall be allowed his liberty “on bail.” This situation obtains because the grand jury, or the magistrate who acted upon the state attorney's information, already has made a preliminary finding that enough evidence exists to justify a trial.

Except in the most serious charges, such as murder, the accused is allowed to remain at liberty after he has posted security, such as a bond, cash, or saleable property, that he will appear in court upon command and face trial. The magistrate at the preliminary hearing determines how much bail must be offered.

Thus the preliminary hearing offers the accused one chance of exoneration, for the magistrate or the grand jury may decide that the evidence is so much more so-called than genuine that the accusation should be dropped. When the evidence seems more substantial, the accused has a second opportunity to obtain exoneration, by means of a trial.

#### TRIAL PROCEDURE

A trial may last for days, but it is basically simple. Usually it is heard before a jury, except in misdemeanor cases when the judge makes the decision, though some states have provided that in certain instances a group of judges or a single judge without a jury may conduct a felony trial. State practices are widely variant; some provide for “side judges,” laymen who sit with the presiding judge and both assist him and keep an eye on him so that a case will be decided by “common sense” rather than by “legal technicalities.”

The trial begins with the selection or “impaneling” of a jury. Each attorney, defense as well as prosecution, is permitted to



"challenge" a prospective juror to see that he is unprejudiced and has the mental and physical equipment for the rigors of a trial. If he believes a prospective juror disqualified or unqualified, the attorney challenges his right to serve and the judge sustains or overrules the challenge. In addition, each attorney is allowed a specified number of "peremptory challenges" in which he makes no statement why he believes the prospective juror might be unfitted. Because the peremptory challenge automatically rejects the juror, the law limits the number of times an attorney may use this device.

The state's attorney makes the first or "opening" statement, in which he tells the jury the central arguments he will attempt to prove by means of witnesses' testimony. The defense lawyer follows with a similar preview of his campaign.

Next, the witnesses are heard. While he is being questioned by the attorney who called him to the stand, the witness undergoes "direct examination," usually a friendly questioning in which the attorney exhibits his witness as favorably as possible. Direct examination done, the witness is given to the opposing attorney for "cross examination," frequently exactly what the name suggests. The opposing attorney attempts to lead the witness into contradicting what he had said previously, or otherwise to make such a poor appearance that his earlier testimony will be discounted by the jury. These examinations may be followed by "redirect examination" by the friendly and "recross examination" by the hostile attorney.

The courts have definite rules or systems as to what substance and nature of testimony may be presented, and it is seeming violations of these rules that provide the basis for an attorney's charge of "objection," to be discussed later.

The state presents its witnesses first, and then the defense witnesses are heard. The testimony completed, the attorneys make their summing-up or review arguments to the jury. The defense attorney speaks first, and then the prosecuting counsel.

The case then goes to the jury which decides upon the guilt or innocence of the accused. If the jury is unable to agree, it so reports to the judge who may direct it to continue deliberating or may discharge it and call for a new trial.

If the verdict is "not guilty," the accused goes free; if the verdict is "guilty," the accused may continue his fight, by requesting an appeal to a higher court, or by asking the judge to dismiss the verdict and order a retrial in the same court.

### THE CORONER

Once an important adjunct to the court system, the coroner is today less necessary. His duty is to inquire into deaths which might have been caused criminally, whether by premeditation or by other culpability, such as negligence, and recommend whether anyone be arrested. He has the power to summon witnesses. In some states the coroner's "inquest" replaces the preliminary examination before a magistrate; in others it merely justifies an arrest and the preliminary examination follows.

When a prosecuting attorney decides that all or part of the accusations against an individual should be dropped, he requests the magistrate to enter on the court record a "nolle prosequi" finding. This finding, usually referred to as "nolle prossed" or "nolled," removes the accusations.

An accused person may request a "change of venue" or transfer of his trial to another court, on grounds that the original court could not or would not give him a fair trial because of various circumstances, such as a flaming community prejudice which would prevent selecting a truly impartial jury.

"Extradition" is resorted to when an accused has left the state in which the accusation is made. The governor of the state where the crime was committed asks the governor of the other state to permit officers of the first state to take the accused and return him for trial. The governor to whom the request is made either himself or through a delegated officer hears the prosecution and the defense arguments and decides whether to allow the extradition. Some states have compacts with their neighbors whereby an officer may go into another state, make an arrest, and return the prisoner to the original state without the formality of extradition. This special power generally depends upon "continuous pursuit"; that is, the chase began in the first state and continued uninterruptedly into the second, so that mere crossing a state line no longer is an effective means of escaping trial.

When a person believes that he is illegally deprived of his liberty, he or his attorney asks a magistrate for a "writ of habeas corpus," meaning literally "you may have the body." This writ requires the person who has the complainant in custody to bring him into court and show cause for continued confinement. If such cause is not shown, the magistrate releases the complainant. Habeas corpus is a device to prevent officers from holding a person unduly without giving him a chance to come into court and defend himself.

### CIVIL CASES

The general system of civil cases is without complication. The filing of a "complaint" or "declaration" listing the complaint of the "plaintiff," the person bringing the action, is the first step in many states. In others, following the common-law system, the plaintiff asks the clerk of court to issue a "praecipe," or summons, to the "defendant," or person against whom the action is being brought, to appear and answer the plaintiff's allegations. The declaration is a formal statement of the plaintiff's claims.

The defendant's action is to present a "demurrer," a "motion," or a "plea." A demurrer or a motion has for its purpose a clarifying or a narrowing of the issue at dispute and frequently is a step in a request to the judge to dismiss the complaint. A plea is an answer to the complaint, either a denial of the allegations or an attempted justification of the actions complained against. Demurrer, motion, and plea are essential preliminaries to bring both plaintiff and defendant into agreement as to exactly what they are disputing. It is the finding, with the judge's help, of a "common denominator," so that both contestants are arguing about the same material.

The trial itself is in general parallel to the criminal case. If the judge or the jury decides for the defendant, he is awarded a "judgment" for money enough to pay all or part of the costs of the lawsuit. If the verdict is for the plaintiff, he is awarded whatever the judge or jury believes appropriate, with or without an added compensation toward the costs of the trial.

If the person against whom a judgment is delivered fails or refuses to make the payment it demands, the other person may go

to the court and obtain an "execution," under which an officer takes over property of the delinquent, sells it at auction, and gives the proceeds to the person to whom the money is owed.

An "equity" suit is one in which the plaintiff asks the court to order that the defendant do or cease doing certain acts. The verdict is a "decree" rather than a "judgment," or is an "injunction." An injunction is a don't-do-it order, for example, restraining the person against whom it is issued from trespassing upon the plaintiff's property.

An injunction may be "temporary" or "permanent." The temporary injunction is granted before the trial; its aim is to preserve the status quo, or existing situation, until a trial gives opportunity for a full investigation of the dispute. The trial will result in lifting this temporary injunction or in making it permanent, perhaps in an altered form.

A "preliminary injunction" or "restraining order" is an emergency finding issued by a judge who has not heard the defense arguments and who acts rapidly in order to preserve the status quo until a temporary injunction can be applied for.

### SPECIAL COURTS

Certain phases of the law are regarded as so important and so particularized that many states establish special courts to consider them. These aspects include settlement of estates of persons deceased or legally incompetent, the relations between ward and guardian, and the adoption of children. The special court for these matters is the "probate" court, whose work usually consists centrally of estate proceedings.

If the person deceased left a will which stipulates who shall care for the estate, the caretaker is termed an "executor" or an "executrix." If the will omitted any such stipulation, the caretaker is known as an "administrator" or "administratrix," the terminology used also when no will at all was left.

After an executor or administrator has been appointed, "letters testamentary" are issued to him. These are the official authority for that person to proceed with the affairs of the estate.

Settling an estate begins with filing a petition or request for appointment of an executor or administrator, and, if a will was

left, includes a request that the will be "admitted to probate." On a specified day, the petitioner presents the will, and has the persons who witnessed the signing of the will by its maker, the "testator" or "testatrix," testify as to the circumstances under which the will was signed. This testimony is needed to show that the will truly reflected the desires of the testator, that he was not subjected to pressure from gain-seeking persons, and that he was of sound mind and hence appreciated what he was doing.

If the will is opposed, it is allowable in some states for the opponent or opponents of the will to present at this time testimony that the will is defective and should be adjudged invalid. In other states, the probate court lacks authority to go beyond taking and recording the testimony of the persons who witnessed the will. If the will is accepted, or "allowed," its opponents must appeal the case to another court, empowered to act in such cases.

When the will has been admitted to probate, executor or administrator appointed, and letters testamentary issued, the court designates competent individuals to "appraise" the estate. They prepare an "inventory" of the property owned by the deceased and a statement of its value. Notices in a local newspaper of general circulation are printed, calling upon creditors of the estate to present their claims against it. After the date set for such presentation, the person caring for the estate pays such of these claims as are justified. The money is taken from the cash on hand, next from funds obtained from the sale of the deceased's personal property, and lastly, if necessary, from the sale of his real estate. The property remaining is tapped again to meet the costs of administration and the inheritance taxes, and what remains is divided as specified in the will, or, if there is no will, as prescribed by law. The last action is the offering of a "final account" showing how the estate has been administered and the "discharge" of the executor or administrator.

A person who died without leaving a will is said to have died "intestate."

### THE CHAIN OF COURTS

Courts are of high or low degree and of two varieties, state and Federal.

At the bottom of the state-court ladder are the "justice," justice of the peace, and the "police magistrate" courts. The justice of the peace has power to act in small actions of contract, minor damage suits, small-debts cases, and a limited scope of criminal cases. The police magistrate, though he is a city official, is also an ex officio justice of the peace. He acts only in criminal cases involving fracture of city ordinances and as the magistrate conducting a preliminary examination to determine whether an accused person shall be dismissed or held for further action.

The next court in authority is the "county court," which deals with a greater variety of cases but still is severely limited in jurisdiction. Except in a preliminary way, the county judge cannot consider crimes for which the penalty is long imprisonment. Generally the county judge has jurisdiction over only misdemeanor cases; felonies must be considered by a still higher court. In civil actions, state law sets a limit upon the size of case a county judge can hear.

The probate court ranks at about the same level as county court, thereby giving those who dissent from its findings an opportunity to appeal to a higher bench.

The highest "trial court" or "court of original jurisdiction" is the "circuit court," sometimes designated as "district" and other times as "superior" court. The nomenclature varies widely with different localities; in one, a "county court" may be termed a "district court" and a "circuit court" may be referred to as "superior court." There is no standardization in these names; they must be learned in connection with the individual region. In some cities the lowest court is the "superior."

The circuit court was so named because years ago the judge traveled from one community to another, "making the circuit," and held court in various cities or towns, remaining in each community long enough to hear whatever cases had arisen since his last visit. Except for a few reservations, the circuit court is empowered to hear civil and criminal cases of the greatest gravity.

Thus the courts are ranked in accordance with the seriousness of the cases they may handle. So far the courts have been considered as trial courts. Because some decisions will be protested, it has been necessary to establish "appellate" courts to

hear appeals and review the work of the original bench. Appeals from the actions of the lower courts, such as the district, are carried to the next highest bench, such as the superior or the circuit. These higher courts, then, act both as trial courts, handling cases of too much gravity to be tried in inferior courts, and as appellate bodies, hearing appeals from decisions in cases that were considered first by the inferior courts. Since the more serious cases must be heard in a higher court, it is necessary to have still higher benches to hear appeals in regard to these more serious cases. Usually a state provides a single "supreme" court to care for such appeals, but several states have "split" the supreme bench by adding "little supreme courts" or "appellate" courts. Thus the supreme court itself may hear only the most exacting cases.

#### FEDERAL COURTS

The Federal system begins with the "district court," a trial court. It has "original jurisdiction" of all civil suits brought by the Federal Government or its authorized officers; of suits by residents of the same state who claim ownership of land under awards or grants from different states; of suits in which more than \$3,000 is at stake and in which the actions trace back to the stipulations of Federal rather than state law, or in which the contestants are residents of different states, or in which the disputants, or some of them, are subjects of foreign states.

In most of these instances the state courts have "concurrent jurisdiction," meaning that the plaintiff may bring his action in either a state or a Federal court. Federal courts have exclusive jurisdiction only in suits relating to copyright, patents, admiralty, bankruptcy, prosecutions for violations of Federal laws, and actions linked to the Federal police or regulatory power in such matters as those related to foods, drugs, and animals.

The next step in the Federal series is the circuit court of appeals, entirely an appellate bench, limited to cases originating in the Federal district courts.

The apex of the system is the United States Supreme Court, whose work is largely appellate. Some cases can be brought before it directly from the district court, and others first must

pass through the circuit court of appeals. The Supreme Court sometimes acts in regard to cases originating in the state courts, when the appeal is based on the argument that the decision of the highest state court was contrary to the Federal law. The Supreme Court will not hear a case in which the issues are wholly of state concern; there must be a link with Federal law.

The Supreme Court sometimes is a trial rather than an appellate body, as in cases affecting consuls, ambassadors, or other ministers, and in certain cases in which a state is a party-at-law.

"Once you realize that the law goes around in circles, there's nothing confusing about it," the seasoned reporter says belittlingly. However, if his own career were reviewed, three items would stand out.

When he was new to the courts, he bought a one-volume dictionary of legal terms. Each day he had the book with him in court, for quick reference. At night he read it as if it were a detective story. From the public library he obtained a Latin grammar, so that he might learn more of the language in which so much of the law sinks its roots.

The second item is that he cultivated the clerk of courts, pestering him with hundreds of questions. "Breaking and entering in the nighttime is a different crime from breaking and entering in the daytime, isn't it?" The clerk of courts, himself frequently a lawyer, is well informed and usually is approachable. He is the quickest help in unraveling a tangled testimony, explaining the significance of a ruling by the judge, or simplifying a counselor's argument.

The third item happened when the reporter had been on the courts beat only a month. At the end of the court day he approached the judge with a question. He was surprised when he was invited to the judge's chamber where he received a twenty-minute explanation and assurance that he was welcome whenever he had a question. He had thought a judge would be beyond his range. Since then the reporter has not hesitated to ask enlightenment.

These three items combine to show that the reporter invested generously of time and energy in learning about the legal system. He knew that no osmotic process would let an adequate under-



standing of the law seep into him, and that until he could think and talk in legal language he was an imprescient rookie. His carefulness was well placed, for a courts reporter either is splendid or is abjectly worthless.

### THREE WAYS TO STUMBLE

If he is worthless, he shows it in one or more of three fashions. Because he knows no law, he substitutes stories saturated with personalities, particularly if they are freakish. He simply cannot understand why the motorist who had the right of way should lose the lawsuit; that the traffic ordinances do not apply on "unaccepted" or nonpublic streets is a legal distinction beyond his faltering comprehension. He dodges by trying a story about the way the defendant stuttered. That some hundreds of residents of the outlying sections live on unaccepted streets, and therefore would be actively interested in this lawsuit rather than in counterfeited humor, escapes him.

He reveals his mediocrity again in failing to understand the importance of the protest an attorney registers when he jumps to his feet and exclaims, "Objection, your honor," or, "Your honor, we record an exception." To this unpenetrating reporter the counselor's vigor seems pointless ritual to be described flippantly:

Attorney Baker put on one of the best shows seen in superior court in months. With his arms, long as windmill blades, waving wildly, he popped up every minute or so to shout "Objection, objection, the defense objects." The calisthenics gave him a lot of exercise and he probably convinced the client that he was right on the job.

Assuredly he was on the job, far more than the reporter realized. The attorney for the losing side may object to the final decision and may request a new trial before the same court or an appeal, that is, a new trial before a higher court. The judge asks on what grounds he objects to the present decision. The lawyer then recounts the "exceptions" he has registered and argues to this effect, "Your honor, had you decided for us rather than against us on these points, your final decision would have been for us rather than against us. We submit that your decisions on these disputed points were incorrect and we wish therefore to

carry the case to another court where these errors can be rectified, thereby making the eventual decision in our favor."

If, now, the attorney has made no protests when disputed points were decided against his client, he can point to nothing in the course of the trial which, had the judge ruled otherwise than as he did, might have affected the outcome. By his silence, he accepted the judge's rulings upon these arguable points.

Accordingly, the lawyer challenges any testimony or statement that he deems improper by recording an "objection." The judge either grants or dismisses this objection. If he dismisses it, and the lawyer believes the item may be important, he then records an "exception," thus entering in the official transcript of the case his dissatisfaction with the judge's decision.

For example, a witness makes statements the lawyer regards as irrelevant. Said the witness: "And then he says, 'So you're one of these smart guys, a smart rube from the tall-corn country. Well, no rube can put anything over on me.' " The attorney interjects, "Objection: irrelevant testimony. We aren't concerned with whether my client called this man a rube but whether he punched Johnson's jaw." The lawyer, facing a jury largely of countrymen, fears that this testimony about "rubes" may brand his client as "one of those smart-aleck city guys" and thus prejudice the jury. He wishes that testimony killed, and asks the judge to rule it out. If the judge refuses, he makes an "exception" of the point, on the ground that the jury was given a false and unfavorable impression of his client through testimony that had no real bearing on the issue.

A lawyer who does not put into the record his objections and exceptions has no ground on which to stand if at the end of the trial he objects to the decision or the verdict. By noticing the sort of objections and exceptions a lawyer files, a well-grounded reporter can diagnose an attorney's line of attack even before the counselor has introduced his own witnesses or made his own arguments, and thus, knowing what to expect, can follow the trial much more intelligently.

The third fashion in which a weak reporter betrays incompetence is by sitting relaxed while the judge gives his instructions to the jury. These instructions are the judge's statements about

which fragments of the law apply to the particular case. He is informing the jury which parts of the law to remember when it weighs the evidence. Because the jury is composed of persons without legal training, the judge must make his instructions lucid as sunlight. If the reporter has been mystified, here is his opportunity to find out what law comes into play.

One murder trial hinged entirely on the judge's decision whether the getaway after the killing was an integral part of the slaying or whether it constituted a separate and distinct crime, that of evading justice. Three men were accused of the murder, and counsel for two of them argued that his clients had not gone inside the building where the killing was committed. They had remained outside, with an automobile, in which they helped the killer escape. Their crime, the lawyer contended, was simply that of assisting the murderer to flee; they could not be charged with participating in the slaying itself.

The judge ruled that the killing and the getaway constituted one crime rather than two, and that the "outside men" therefore were as guilty as the man who went inside the building and fired the pistol. As a result, all three men were convicted and executed.

How could a reporter write of this case without emphasizing the judge's instructions that the jury was to consider shooting and getaway as one crime rather than two? Without this all-important decision, the entire case would be opaque.

#### CRIMINAL *vs.* CIVIL ACTIONS

One side of court, the criminal, customarily is covered to the point of surfeit; another, the civil, is too little regarded. Ordinarily the easier case to understand is the criminal, in which often the only question at issue is that of identifying the accused person as the one who committed the crime. Only the "larger" criminal trials are likely to become bafflingly intricate.

Civil cases, those in which the law is asked to provide redress for an injury or damage rather than to punish an offender, are the more tangled. Especially when they involve disposition of money, civil cases become complicated. A question about the boundaries of a piece of land can turn the court into a classroom in mathematics, floraculture, and meteorology.

Reporters have tended, therefore, to emphasize criminal cases, as being easier to handle and more interesting, since they deal more with "persons" than with "abstract arguments." The testimony of a short-order cook in an all-night lunchroom that, "Sure, he's the guy; I remember that scar on his neck," works into a story much more willingly than does the testimony of an investment banker that P. Q. R. stock seemed a sensible buy at forty-five dollars because the company's balance sheet analyzed hopefully. As the banker discusses the balance sheet, dollar signs and strange terms such as "assumed debentures" and "convertible preferred stock" clutter his testimony. It's hard sledding and the reporter writes two paragraphs about the civil suit and nine about the criminal.

Too many reporters believe that "nobody cares about civil cases, because they're so hard to understand." Actually, many civil cases can be enormously interesting, even fascinating. A passenger sues a railroad for injuries received when a train was derailed because a storm had washed part of a sandbank down upon the track. The railroad counters with the argument that the storm was "an act of God" for which the company was not responsible. The passenger's lawyer wins the case by contending that the railroad should have known, on such a stormy night, that the Almighty might do strange things and should have exercised unusual caution. A manufactured case? Not at all; completely genuine.

It must be admitted that many civil cases are uninteresting until translated. How shall the reporter translate them? This is centrally a matter of learning the legal vocabulary, which differs somewhat from one state to another. A highly practical way is for the reporter to go through three months' issues of his paper and make a list of the legal terms used in the news stories, to look up their definitions in his one-volume law dictionary, and to memorize those definitions. This is a most practical device, because it acquaints the young reporter with the working vocabulary of the judges and lawyers of his city, and with the sorts of cases commonly heard in his region. In one city, many cases will deal with the river waterway which carries much of the city's commerce and these cases hence will be filled with riparian con-

siderations; in another, the laws of navigation almost never will enter a case but the disposition of estates will be reflected constantly because that city has been the home of an unusual number of men who became wealthy.

Certainly, this is genuine work, and without it the reporter cannot hope to become an expert. If he is to become a good courts reporter, he must become a fairly good, though unofficial, lawyer.

Court reporting presents a fairly long series of dangers. They are:

1. Contempt of court, that is, conduct offensive or prejudicial to the conduct of a case. The judge is dictator of the courtroom; he has the power to make the rules under which the case shall be heard. There are five principal ways in which the reporter can offend the judge and thereby exhibit contempt of court:

- A. Comment upon an unfinished case. While an action is in trial, it may be reported freely but that reporting must be objective, so that it will not bias or sway witnesses or jurors. The chief trouble comes when the reporter, anxious to clarify a bit of testimony, evaluates it and thereby tells readers what they should think of it. "Larson's testimony was shot to pieces by Miss Barden's reasonable and calm account of what happened at the drug-store. Though Larson previously had been the height of confidence and had made an excellent impression upon the jury, he now was nervous and fidgety. The jurors reacted strongly and it was evident that Larson's claims were being discounted heavily."

Most illuminating, but think how it can affect a pro-Larson witness who has not yet given his testimony. That witness easily can say to himself, "Shucks, it's all over, Larson's licked," go into court with a desire only to emerge as soon as possible, and give listless, faltering testimony instead of the confident, telling information he had expected to present.

- B. Printing material stricken from the record. Occasionally the judge expunges statements or testimony, thereby giving them the legal effect of never having been uttered. To mention this stricken material is in contempt. Once in a very great while, the judge may outrageously abuse his authority by expunging mate-

rial that should be part of the court record. When the reporter believes this to be the situation, he discusses the matter with the managing editor. The issue is too important to be decided in isolation.

*C.* Taking pictures or making drawings in the courtroom or building. This is entirely up to the judge. He is empowered to forbid it whenever he believes that this "art work" would impair the dignity of his court. In these days when reporters increasingly are equipped with cameras as well as pencils, the reporter should realize that a picture taken after a judge's prohibition is completely in contempt.

*D.* Printing or emphasizing what the judge asks be deleted or mentioned lightly. The judge has no right, except in a few cases, usually with sex considerations, to prohibit the printing of information that goes into the record of a trial. The reporter should remember, however, that the judge generally has the power to "clear the courtroom" and that presentation of what happened while the room was thus closed to the public is rigidly limited to the material in the court records, which may be in summary rather than in complete form.

More often the issue of a judge's request is a matter of expediency rather than of contempt. The judge asks that a divorce case be mentioned briefly if at all, so that he may have a chance to work for a reconciliation. If he fails, he has no objection to the case being presented in full. The reporter is within his legal rights in ignoring the judge's request, but to do so may bring retaliation when the judge takes the attitude that, "You wouldn't play ball with me a while ago, so why should I extend you extra courtesy now?" Only a truly strong story is worth the hostility of a judge, particularly when that hostility could be avoided by waiting a few days and then using the story.

*E.* Grand jury indictments, or bills, voted but not yet formally reported back to the court. This worry faces the morning-paper reporter more than the man for an evening paper. The grand jury finishes its work at 5:55 P.M. and the judge announces that he will receive its report next morning at 10 o'clock. A court official, usually the clerk, gives the reporter information about the indictments. While the chance for trouble is slight, it is

perpetual, because the judge is entirely within his powers if he declares that describing those indictments before they have been given formally to the bench is in contempt.

2. Libel. This issue is discussed at length in Chapter 22.

3. Getting facts twisted. Often this is a manhandling of the legal language. The complainant is the one presenting the accusation or complaint; the defendant is the one against whom it is lodged. If he's listless or weary, the reporter gets the two tangled and has Jones suing Smith when actually it's the other way around. When he is covering a ball game, the reporter can yawn extendedly, miss a couple of strikes, and be on duty again for the pitch that is slammed for a triple. Court reporting isn't like that. One inattentive moment can cause him to miss a bit of testimony or an argument that, though given briefly and perhaps almost casually, may be used later as one of the backbones of the whole case.

Particularly when he is doing cold court, that is, picking up a case from the clerk's records instead of attending the trial in person, the reporter is likely to go astray. If he doesn't understand the clerk's records, he asks. Some clerks have semishorthand systems that would snarl Sherlock Holmes; until the reporter has learned the clerk's codes and ciphers, he asks freely for translation.

Never does he take a chance on the meaning of a legal term. The judge announces that he is issuing a writ of mandamus and the reporter terms it an "injunction," on the theory that since a mandamus is a command and an injunction also is a command, the two mean the same. Next day, while the reporter is scarlet beyond the ears, the judge refers caustically to "this morning's newspaper report which was strikingly, even unusually, inaccurate."

### WRITING COURT NEWS

The court story has two classes of readers, the everyday and the occasional. Though they are a minority group, some readers follow the courts each day, and become expert readers. The reporter mustn't overvalue these faithful readers. They demand mainly that a court story be accurate; if it is a trifle murky, they are willing to struggle with it until they can let in the light. The

occasional readers are much more numerous and must be appealed to, for they will not follow a story unless it is enticing.

Since many cases last more than one day, the later stories must carry a throwback to the start of the action, for the benefit of readers who missed that opening-day chronicle. Without this tie-in, today's installment is meaningless. Yet the background must not be so long that it wearies the constant reader.

The longer a case persists, the greater the chance that any particular reader has noticed it, and hence the shorter the tie-in can be. The tie-in for the second day might take this length:

Jamieson is accused of shooting and wounding Robinson at the Red Rooster night club on the night of March 5, when both men tried to win the companionship of Miss Dresden, a club hostess. The shooting took place in the entrance to the club, about 11:30, when Jamieson met Robinson who was returning from his parked car, where he had gone for a moment.

On the seventh day of the trial, the tie-in dwindles to:

Jamieson is charged with shooting Robinson in a quarrel about a hostess at the Red Rooster night club.

On the fourteenth day, the throwback shrinks to "in the Red Rooster night club shooting."

Accustomed to the one-paragraph lead for other stories, the courts reporter sometimes tries to cram a legal lead too full. A courts lead can stretch to half a column or more; whatever sacrosanctity the one-paragraph version has elsewhere is lost in court stories. An excellent device is the snapper, a flash-characterization, followed by a summary:

Five motorists paid \$215 in fines yesterday.

They appeared before Judge Emanuel A. Hudson in superior court on charges ranging from speeding to driving while drunk. Though each denied his guilt, none could convince the judge.

Two speeders each paid \$15, one drunken driver was assessed \$100, a reckless driver forfeited \$50, and an operator who had no license paid \$35.

The story after the lead should contain verbatim testimony, for that is its best way of being human and lively. The testimony need be but a sentence or so, for only a very good case will be re-



ported at extended length. Choosing that bit of testimony demands listening so closely that the reporter sees clearly which one or two statements characterize or summarize the case. Here is a bit that doesn't, followed by one that does:

"I was as surprised as could be when he sued me," Mr. Brown declared. "I'd never had anything like that happen to me before."

"Nobody can two-time me twice," Mr. Gerald said. "I'll stand it the first time, but when it happens again I'll protect myself even if I have to go to law about it."

The first extract gives no flavor of the case other than that Mr. Brown is undergoing his first lawsuit; the second suggests very definitely the attitude of Complainant Gerald.

Testimony takes three forms. First is dialog, used when the testimony is brief:

"He told me he knew it was a public street because there wasn't any 'Private Thoroughfare' sign," Mr. Swenson said. "I told him the sign might have been knocked down and never replaced."

The second is the "Q(uestion) and A(nswer)" which is employed mainly for extended passages:

Q.—Where were you on the night of January 4?

A.—I don't think I remember.

Q.—Why don't you remember?

A.—I didn't have any reason to remember. We didn't do anything particular in the days right after New Year's.

Q.—Do you deny, then, that you were at the Gilsons' bridge party that night?

A.—Well, we were at a party at the Gilsons' some night, but I don't recall which night it was.

The third form is summary, used to present much material in brief space:

Mr. Clark testified that he had heard Mr. Eldon say that the mortgage had been reduced from \$5,500 to \$4,000.

Mixing dialog and summary in a story is frequent, but the Q. and A. generally is reserved for the supercomplete chronicle, in which it appears as the only method used.

The reporter's first question is: how much space does this story merit? He must distinguish between routine cases and those of distinctive interest. "Nothing but speeding cases, with \$10 fines," he reflects as he waits for court to open. Probably he's right, but one of those routine cases may sprout aspects that make it most unusual or most important. Harry Byrnes admits he was doing sixty on Minnesota Boulevard but argues that his speed was justified because he was going to a drugstore to get a prescription filled for a neighbor who had beseeched him to, "Hurry, go like the devil; this is life and death." The way the judge decides this case will interest thousands of readers and perhaps may become an important precedent to guide other courts.

Routine cases must be reported compactly, but just as *clearly* as the distinctive actions. This means "writing tight" and is in no measure a justification for careless or listless reporting.

The reporter handling a morning court for an afternoon paper has a choice of procedures. The easiest way is to chronicle the cases in the order in which they are heard. The first case is that of a drunken driver, the second an assault and battery, the third a speeder, and the fourth a milk-bottle theft. The story is chronological, and dispersed; it has no structure.

A much better method, and one requiring virtually no more work, classifies the cases. The reporter records each one on a separate sheet of paper. Back at the office, he simply shuffles the sheets into a structure. He groups the cases by classifications, with all the drunken drivers in one division and all the thefts in another. The most interesting or the most important categories are at the front, and the less valuable categories at the end. If the cases do not lend to such a dividing, he arranges them in the order of dwindling interest, with the best case first and the weakest case last, quite regardless of the possibility that both actions may be automobile cases.

When a single case is being tried, he will present more detail. This case often may persist more than one day and some of its installments will be feeble, because any long trial has dull days. During the doldrums, the reporter cuts sharply, but not so drastically that the make-up editor gives the story a tiny headline

that sinks it so low on the page that the faithful readers must hunt hard to find it.

Enlivening the dull-day story always is risky. Announcing that "startling developments are expected tomorrow" is the most dangerous way, because tomorrow may see another lusterless chapter. If the story is too short to have much chance for display on the page, try a compact review of the previous days. This background will assist both the "new" and the constant reader, by giving each a better chance to see the perspective of the case. It isn't padding, so long as it is written with economy of words. A five-day case has enough ramifications that a review on the third day is valuable.

Most of the day in court is drab but there was one moment of flash. Attorney Bevins didn't hide his scorn of the meek little witness and fired at him a question with a highly Latin flavor. "Mr. Bevins," the witness replied gently, "your Latin is faulty. You should have used the ablative absolute." It wasn't an important interlude, but it was genuinely human and even Attorney Bevins had a smile out of it. To lead the story with this sparkling but trifling moment may spoil the story's focus, yet the moment mustn't be lost. Write it separately—and briefly—and mark it "Box with Superior Court" or "Ruled Insert with Superior Court." Mark the main story "With Box?" or "With Ruled Insert." The copy desk and the make-up editor will do the rest, and the sparkling bit will appear beside the main story or in it, with distinctive typography.

A court case always should be identified with the action causing it. If it is a criminal case, it is rarely necessary to give the full details of the crime, but some throwback is needed. Often a single sentence suffices:

Thompson was arrested at 1:30 Monday morning, the 17th, after his car struck a police cruiser on Monroe Street near Allen Street.

This tie-in helps the many readers who knew of the arrest two days earlier and have been wondering, though mildly, what would happen to the motorist.

The careful reporter changes the style of his story to minimize the damage if a compositor's eyes miss a couple of lines in one case and return to the copy in the middle of the next case. Here is the way the paragraph was printed:

John Smith, Middleton, was found guilty of robbing the Co-op store in that town and was remanded to the sheriff to await sentence.

What the reporter wrote was:

John Smith, Middleton, was found not guilty of driving while drunk.

Henry Jones, Oregon, was found guilty of robbing the Co-op store in that town and was remanded to the sheriff to await sentence.

Because the compositor overlooked the second line of the Smith case and the first line of the Jones case, he has made the paper declare that Smith was convicted of a crime for which he was never arrested. Mr. Smith thereby has the tracks nicely greased for a libel action that will cost the paper \$500 in an out-of-court settlement.

#### FORMS OF LEAD

Court leads need not be everlastingly the same. When many cases are being heard at one sitting, the reporter has a choice of possibilities.

1. The first part of the lead mentions the most interesting or important case. Next it mentions other high-light cases, or it summarizes them without giving names. Thus:

Herbert Jordan, 2109 Monroe Street, was sentenced in superior court today by Judge H. H. Hosmer to 1½ years in the house of correction for assaulting his stepmother, Mrs. Edna Jarvis, who is still in General Hospital with injuries suffered eight days ago when Jordan beat her with a golf club.

Four motorists were fined a total of \$165, and two young men were put on probation in petty larceny cases.

—or, for the  
second paragraph—

Henry Downie and George Arden were fined \$50 each for reckless driving, John Seecomb \$35 for driving after his license had been revoked, and William Marsh \$30 for driving with improper registration plates. Adam Hart and Peter Dunner were put on probation after they admitted stealing electrical goods valued at \$2.25 from the Grant dime-to-dollar store.

2. The lead is a summary that does not mention any specific case. Use a change of syntax from one day to the next. Thus:

Jail sentences totaling eight years and fines amounting to \$265 were imposed yesterday. . . .

Twenty-one cases, all resulting in convictions, . . .

Twelve convictions and six acquittals. . . .

The wise, and merciful, reporter considers the sort of headline a story will receive. The account leading with the most interesting case is likely to get a "name head," such as "Marshall Fined // For Wet Driving." A thirty-point headline is more severe punishment than the fine levied by the judge. The reporter considers whether the offense justifies a "name head." A technical reckless-driving case well might not warrant such treatment, for the motor laws are so complex that a genuinely good driver can be brought in on a fairly serious charge of which he is technically but not "morally" guilty.

The summary lead, which mentions no names, puts the emphasis upon the court rather than upon the accused. It is a good form for a day when the "technically guilty" cases are the strongest part of the court news.

Whatever cases are mentioned, whether by summary or by name, in the lead should be detailed in the order of presentation in the lead. This sequence gives the story an obvious structure and makes it much easier for the reader to follow rapidly.

Yes, the Prince likes court reporting. He sees the world without leaving his warm and comfortable seat in the courtroom. He has an interesting work, and a highly responsible one, for the concept that thousands of readers have of the courts that protect them is based exclusively upon the stories the Prince writes. The readers "do their own thinking," but they do it with materials provided by the Prince and their decisions are the ones the Prince

wishes them to make. He is truly a dictator over men's thoughts. "Oh, I don't know," he murmurs. "It isn't quite like that." The city editor thought one time that the Prince's little aspersions about the court run were genuine and suggested a shift to another beat.

"Then I'm through," the Prince announced.

And the city editor was glad to change his mind.

## THE PRESS AND THE LAW

## IGNORANCE ABOUNDING

“NO PAY RAISES this year,” the city editor announces grimly. “That jury just brought in a \$6,000 verdict against the paper.”

Libel suits are not among a newspaper’s daily tribulations, though the chance of such an action is so ever-present that the cub has heard “libel” and more “libel” in his colleagues’ conversation until he is afraid every story he writes will have a \$10,000 sequel.

He has asked the old timers what is the law of libel. The answers ran about like this: “Oh, it’s simple enough. It means that you ‘can’t, you can’t. . . . I can’t explain it very well, but it means that you’ve got to have the goods on a man before you call him cockeyed.”

The old timer has been twenty years with the newspaper, yet of the libel law he knows only a hatful of disconnected fragments. By rote memory he knows certain things to avoid, but he does not understand the law. Surprisingly few newspaper folk do understand it. It changes with each state, and it can be revised whenever the legislature meets. Even more important, it changes as the courts’ various decisions reinterpret the statutes. “It isn’t what the legislature passes but what the courts decide the law means that counts,” declare the cynical.

The newspaper worker cannot learn the law once and for all; it has to be learned once and then modified from time to time as more and more court decisions are made. Reporters often fear that the law is too complex for a layman to understand, and rely

on whatever rules of thumb they have picked up. They expect, also, that the desk editors will make the changes in stories needed to pluck out any libel. This is a compliment, but it burdens the desk unfairly.

The reporters have one microscope with which they can obtain a lucid picture of the law and its workings. That microscope is the journalistic trade magazine, *Editor & Publisher*, which explains simply and clearly the decisions given in libel cases, wherever they may be tried. Excellent as it is in many other ways, *Editor & Publisher* is unexcelled as a textbook on libel.

The cub is thoroughly frightened, and makes an excuse to stay in the office until late afternoon, until only he and the city editor remain. Always the city editor is the last to leave.

"I thought you were through a long time ago, Bill."

"Oh, I had a couple of letters to write. Say, Mr. Anderson, what is this libel law business?"

A broad grin connects the city editor's ears. "Oh, so that's what's bothering you. All right, Bill, I'm in no hurry today; I'll try to explain it, but I'm no schoolteacher.

"In the first place, Bill, it's the newspapers' turn today. There was a time when the railroads were the victims. A farmer might have a cow so old she wasn't good for anything except to be ground up for canned hash, but if a railroad engine hit her, she became choice stock and a jury would award that farmer \$500 for an animal that wouldn't bring \$18 at the slaughterhouse. Then the utilities companies had their turn. You could sue a utility for anything you wanted, and the jury would give you twice what you asked for. Right now the newspapers are the victims. If someone shouts that he's been libeled, the jury is rather likely to give him a smacking big verdict—like that one against us this morning.

"I've exaggerated it a little bit, but that \$6,000 is going to hurt.

"Now this libel law we speak of isn't one single law, but a whole group of laws and a whole group of court interpretations of those laws. The business would be pretty involved, if it didn't have a common denominator. Heaven be thanked, it does have one."

He pauses and the cub is quick to proffer cigarets.



"Thanks. I've got a match. Now that common denominator is in the purpose back of all the libel laws—to protect a man's good name, unless he does something that deprives him of his right to that good reputation. You have to remember the 'unless' in it. The first part of that definition I gave you—to protect a man's good name—means that we can't print things that present a person in an unfavorable manner. The 'unless' part—unless he does something to deprive him of the right to that good reputation—means that under certain circumstances we can say things about him that may hurt like tophet, and he hasn't any kick."

"In other words," interposes the cub, "the libel law is a halter around our necks to keep us from saying a lot of things."

"Per-haps, but you make it worse than it really is. The law is also a protection for us, because it marks off the things we can do as well as those we can't. It defends us as often as it restricts us. There's a crackerjack good book that gives you the whole thing, from that angle, protecting us. I have it at home. Some prof by name of —, oh, well, skip it.<sup>1</sup> You can borrow the book some time; it's splendid.

"Here's the way the law works. We print a story that John Doe has been fined \$100 for drunken driving. That story may hurt and pain John Doe terrifically. Some of his friends may stop speaking to him, he may have to plead with his boss to keep from being discharged, yet the law holds that we haven't damaged him unjustifiably.

"Why not? Because we told the truth about him. It wasn't the story that hurt him, but the truth back of the story."

"So we're protected if we tell the truth?" the cub interrupts.

"Not quite so simple," the city editor amends. "We must be able to prove that it was the truth, which means making a jury believe it. In the case I just suggested, we could prove the truth of what we printed because we could bring in the official court record showing that John Doe really was fined \$100 for drunken driving. There are times, though, when the jury won't accept what we said about a man as being true. We may know it's true, but that does no good if the jury prefers not to believe it. I'm

<sup>1</sup> The name the city editor couldn't remember was F. S. Siebert, *Rights and Privileges of the Press*, New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., Inc., 1934.

not being cynical, just practical. I've held out or toned down more than one story because I knew that it would be a hard job to convince a jury. We have to think about the jury as much as about the law itself.

"There's another factor. In some states, the truth by itself isn't a complete defense; the motives for telling the truth must be good. There are only a few of these good-motives states; let's see if I can remember them. I used to know them. Three in the East—Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts; one half way down South—West Virginia; and two in the Midwest—Illinois and Nebraska.

"I don't know which way is fairer. If the truth, without any regard of motives, is enough to justify a story, then a 'scandal sheet' can dig up something from twenty-five years ago, something that a man has lived down completely, and that paper can revive that old crime or indiscretion or whatever it was and smear the man all over again. That would be bad, and the only thing to prevent it is the general newspaper morality, or ethics, or whatever you want to call it. The other way, truth plus good motives, can get out of joint pretty badly. We might find out something very important about a man, something people should know. We might find out, for instance, that a police captain is a silent partner in a hashish house or an opium den. If that captain was big enough politically, he might be able to control a jury so that it would decide that our motives for exposing him weren't good enough and penalize us \$25,000, even though it was admitted we had proved the captain was in the narcotics business. That wouldn't happen very often, because our courts usually are above that sort of politics. It has happened, though, just as now and then a paper has run off the track when it got an exposure that never should have been revealed. The best you can say is that either system can be abused; neither one is perfection."

"Another cigaret, chief?"

"Yes, thanks." Scratch of match against thumbnail. "We'd better go back to the beginning now. We've said that by and large a statement isn't libelous if you can prove the truth so well

that a jury believes you. Many times, we'll argue in court that what we said wasn't libelous anyway. We're offering two defenses—it's true, and even if it isn't true it isn't libelous because it didn't damage the fellow.

#### PUBLIC RIDICULE, HATRED, OR CONTEMPT

"That gives us a chance to attempt a definition of the libel law. You might say that to libel a person is to damage him unwarrantedly by the printed word. Next, what do you mean by 'to damage'? The law says that when what you print holds up a person to public ridicule, hatred, or contempt, you damage him. Those are the three ways you can hurt his reputation."

"Couldn't we look back through all the libel cases and make a list of the things the courts have said were damaging, and then memorize the list?" the cub asks.

The city editor shakes his head. "Wouldn't work, Bill. In the first place, the list would be too long to remember. Second, it wouldn't be complete; there are still some ways that no careless reporter has got around to yet. Third, the way you say a thing may count quite as much as the thing itself.

"Returning to this question of what it is that damages a person:

"If you call a man a criminal, you damage him. If you call a woman a prostitute, you damage her. In either case, you say that the person isn't respectable or isn't decent. When you say that, it's automatically libelous. Libel *per se* is the legal expression.

"Other times, you may say a thing that ordinarily wouldn't be damaging, but this time special circumstances exist to make it damaging. You might say that John Doe went out to the Red Rooster night club. That doesn't seem libelous, for there's nothing wrong with going to a night club except that it's a waste of money. Suppose, though, that everyone knows the Red Rooster isn't a night club but is just a 'front' for a brothel. Everyone knows it except you, that is. The special circumstance that this one night club is known to be a brothel means you have said in effect that Doe went there for 'immoral purposes.' That would be libel *per quod*, that is, libel because of those special circumstances.

"In either one of these, *per se* or *per quod*, you still have your defense that what you said was true. But if you can't prove it was true, what you said was libelous.

"If you say a person is indecent, or criminal, you've hurt him. You hurt him if you say he's incompetent, that he isn't up to standard in his profession or his occupation. We never write that a person died '*of* an operation.' That would be saying that the surgeon was so clumsy he killed the patient. We say that he died '*after* an operation.' That doesn't suggest the surgeon killed him; his heart might have given out, or it just might have been his time.

"We damage a person if we say he's below normal in integrity or financial stability, because his reputation with the public depends in part on his being regarded as of integrity and stability. If I wrote a story about you, and said when it wasn't true that your landlady had ejected you because you were too far back in the rent, I'd be damaging you.

"Same thing with health. We expect a person to be healthy, or to have a good reason for not being. If we say that John Doe is sick abed with whooping cough, we haven't damaged him because whooping cough is a perfectly legitimate reason for being sick. But if we say that he's got what our radio friends so politely call 'social disease' we do damage him because we've as much as said that he contracted something when he went too far off the straight and narrow—went so far off that he's no longer entitled to public esteem. It doesn't have to be a disease like that; we damage him if we say wrongly that he has any unpalatable sickness, leprosy, or bubonic plague, or tuberculosis. What we're saying then is that he's so dangerous that everyone would wish to avoid him.

"'Public ridicule, hatred, or contempt'—we say in one way or another that a person is substandard, that he isn't what the public thinks one in his position should be. We can do damage even with a characterization. In some towns, to term a man a Fascist or a Nazi would damage him cruelly."

"Yet you say the libel law doesn't cramp us," the cub objects. "I don't follow you."

"All those things I've mentioned can be libelous because they

pull a person down in public esteem. That is, they can be libelous if they are untrue. You see, that doesn't invalidate the 'truth as a defense' aspect.

#### WRITER *vs.* READER

"There are still other things we must watch. One is that what the writer had in mind counts less than what the public believes he had in mind. You write that 'John Doe is a doctor who says little about the operations he performs,' and you mean that he's modest instead of boastful. But if he can show that readers took your writing to mean that he specializes in illegal operations, you have libeled him. So long as you stick to straight English, you won't meet that danger very often; it comes usually when you're trying to be humorous or smart.

"And you must remember that the newspaper is responsible for what it prints. If the news is wrong, the paper is to blame, regardless of whether it or the source the story came from made the mistake. A while ago, oh, about a year before you joined the staff, we ran a little story about a chap being taken to the hospital in one of the suburban towns. The story said he had slashed his throat, attempting suicide.

"We got our information from the state police, who had taken him to the hospital. He didn't die, and when he got out of the hospital he sued us for damaging his character by saying he tried to kill himself. His neck was gashed, all right, but not at the throat. We settled out of court for \$500. Our story was wrong, because the officers who gave us the information were wrong, but we and not they had to do the paying.

"If one of our country correspondents wired us a story, and the telegraph company got the names twisted—said the wrong man had been arrested—we'd have to foot the libel bill, even though it wasn't our mistake. That's one reason we're so strict about getting names right. You write that John D. Doe was arrested when it should have been John T. Doe and we're beaten if John D. wants to make a case of it.

"Why, sometimes, Bill, you can libel a fellow without naming him. There was a story a while back about a child who died from eating what was suspected of being impure ice cream. The

reporter didn't give the storekeeper's name, but did tell where the store was—corner of Holderness and Allen Streets. That was enough; it identified the store, so that we would have been saying in effect that this storekeeper had been selling rotten ice cream. The copy desk caught that one, and a good thing it did, because the board of health investigation showed that what killed the youngster was something else she'd eaten. Stars above! if we'd let the first-day story identify that storekeeper, even without using his name, he'd have clawed \$10,000 out of us."

"Can't a newspaper do anything without running risks?" the cub moans.

#### THE ROOTS OF THE LAW

"Plenty of things, Bill. We have a very genuine freedom, so long as we continue to deserve it. Compare our position with that of newspaper people in Italy, or Japan—or even England. So long as we meet the requirements of the truth, or of the truth plus worthy motives, we're practically without harmful restraint. An editor in Japan, well, the police tell him what he can and cannot print, and they don't draw their specifications from details written into the statute books but from their own, unbridled ideas of what they do or don't wish the public to know about. Why, a Japanese editor may have on his 'don't print' spike more than a hundred orders and commands—and that was before the Japanese began their war with the Chinese.

"An English editor isn't a great deal better off. That's an ironical aspect, Bill, because our freedom derives largely from what the English did years and years ago. We might say that they won the freedom for themselves and for us, but they weren't able to hold it, and we were.

"Our libel laws go way, way back to old England. You recall your English history and remember that Magna Charta didn't come because of any lofty ideals about democracy, but because of some mighty burning dislikes—gripes, if you wish to be blunt—about the way the officials were manhandling the other people. The idea of holding court in the open instead of in secret was just a step to make it impossible for officialdom to railroad some poor devil into a dungeon. The English realized that if court had

to be held openly, with anyone allowed to watch and listen, it would be ever so much harder to 'frame' a chap the administration disliked.

"The English are thoroughgoing. They wrote three items into their laws to keep the administration under control. Didn't write them all at the same time, you understand, but they kept on tinkering with the law until all three were there.

"One provision was that the police must keep a record of all arrests, what the charges were against the persons arrested, and that news of those arrests could be spoken or printed without fear of punishment or reprisal. That cuts both ways, because some persons don't wish to have their arrests proclaimed, but it was a step in bringing the police actions out into the daylight. They couldn't seize a man, lock him up for six or seven months, without placing a definite accusation against him and giving him a chance to defend himself against that accusation. They couldn't retaliate against a newspaper for telling what they did, and neither could the fellow they did it to. Both sides had their hands tied, in order that what the police did could become known without impediments.

"Then they did the same thing about the courts, and about the legislatures—what happens in them can be printed without fear of libel, if you meet certain conditions. If it weren't for that, a prosecutor might get a conviction by terribly unfair methods and keep those methods from becoming known by threatening to sue the paper if it printed anything. A legislature could be as rotten as it wished, and keep its pollution hidden by threatening to sue any paper that tried to tell about what was said in those legislative meetings."

"Please, Mr. Anderson. You said all this news can be used 'if you meet certain conditions.'"

"Um-humph. The law says that these things are of so much public concern that telling about them mustn't be hampered, but they have to be told about in the right way, or the people who read of them get the wrong slant. The law says that a court or legislative story has to be 'accurate,' 'complete,' and 'impartial.' That sounds heavy, but it isn't. 'Accurate,' well, that means just what it says. If we say that a man was fined \$100 we have to

give his name right, and not use the name of someone who never has been in court. 'Impartial' doesn't give us any trouble, because it, too, means what it says. The word that tangles us up is 'complete.' It doesn't mean that we have to tell everything that was done or said in court or in the legislative chamber. What it does mean is that we have to carry a story long enough to present both sides of the case. For example, if we gave the prosecution a full column and never mentioned the defense, we wouldn't have a complete story—it would be one-sided. Sometimes a court case lasts for days. If we start with this case, we must keep it alive, in order to keep it 'complete.' If we drop the story one day, we lose all the immunity we had for the other days. That's fair enough. It's really just another way of saying 'impartial.'

#### CONDITIONAL PRIVILEGE

"The law gets into some pretty soggy language. It talks about 'conditional privilege.' It means by 'privilege' the general immunity from libel that it gives to these kinds of news, and by 'conditional' it means that that privilege is ours only if we meet those specifications of accuracy, impartiality, and completeness. There is such a thing as 'absolute privilege' but I don't bother much about it. You hold up a piece of news to the accuracy-impartiality-completeness tests and you'll be safe. Bill, I've got to sign off or I'll be late for supper and *die Frau* wouldn't like that."

The city editor has given Bill a workable start on the libel structure. He omitted various details. For example, he neglected saying that privileged matter includes official communications of military or naval officers, Presidents or governors, and official proceedings of boards and commissions which are public in character, such as a decision of the Interstate Commerce Commission as to culpability for a trainwreck.

He overlooked mentioning that testimony given before a grand jury, which does its work in camera, is distinctly without privilege and indeed may be presented only at the risk of the newspaper being adjudged in contempt of court. The only grand jury actions which are privileged are the official reports of indictments



it has voted, and these are available only when the grand jury formally releases them.

Nor did the city editor distinguish between the various classifications of damages: nominal, compensatory, and punitive. Nominal damages, awarded in some trivial amount such as six cents or one dollar, are given against a newspaper simply to vindicate the character of the person complaining that he has been libeled. Their effect is that of saying that he was not so bad as the newspaper pictured him and that he has suffered hardly at all because of that inaccurate picturing.

Compensatory damages are given as a means of recompense for the harm done by the libel. They include special damages for direct, tangible financial harm, such as loss of employment resulting from the libel.

Punitive damages are quite what the term suggests. They are not awarded as compensation for actual harm done by the libel, but as punishment for the newspaper for acting with bad motives or acting with gross carelessness, or recklessness. Punitive damages are given for a "malicious" libel, compensatory damages for an "accidental" libel.

When a newspaper is convinced that it has libeled a person, a prompt, sincere, and prominent retraction is in order, both in the interests of fairness, and as a means of avoiding or reducing the amount of damages it may be ordered to pay. The power of a retraction varies with the several states; to assume that it negates and erases the harm done by the libel is errant. Generally it is merely a mitigation, and can be used only to show that the newspaper, shown that its statements were in error, did everything in its power to repair the harm done by those statements. In some states, a retraction has considerable force, but it is not a cure-all. However great or little its protective power, a gracious retraction should be made whenever a newspaper has committed a libel.

Again, the city editor did not distinguish between civil and criminal libel, once a most important distinction but now increasingly forgotten. A century ago, an editor whose paper without right damaged someone was arrested, quite as if he had been

caught robbing a bank. He was brought to trial as if he were a murderer. The state, not the person libeled, was the complainant; the man who was libeled was only a witness. If the editor was convicted, he was fined or clapped into jail. The man he libeled received no benefit from the punishment of the editor; the libel might have cost him his friends, his position, or his good reputation, but he had no recompense. The law regarded libel as crime, on the reasoning that it so aroused and inflamed the person it damaged that he was likely to take matters into his own hands and forcibly attempt redress, thereby breaking the public peace. In other words, the editor had stirred up a civil commotion, as genuinely as if he had led a gang of rioters, and civil commotion is a crime.

As the years passed, smart lawyers saw that a different sort of libel action would be of more benefit to their clients. Instead of asking that the editor be punished as a criminal, they slapped a civil lawsuit against him and asked for monetary damages, just as they would against a railroad whose engine had killed a farmer's cow. The man who was libeled was much better satisfied to have a \$500 or \$5,000 payment than to have only the pleasure of knowing that the editor was in jail for the next twelvemonth. Today criminal libel is employed rarely.

### POLICE NEWS

The law permits use of the *recorded* parts of police news, that is, a statement of the arrest and the charge lodged against the prisoner. The reasoning by which the police decided to make the arrest is not privileged. Thus:

Eric Markley, 30, of 2109 Suffield Street, was arrested this morning by Policeman William Ryan on a charge of robbing the Adams department store. Unable to supply \$2,000 bond, he was held and will be brought into superior court tomorrow morning.

The Adams store was robbed on Sunday night, the 16th, by a burglar who took a quantity of silverware and other jewelry, and three expensive rugs. Suspicion was directed at Markley, who has had a \$20 a week job, when he began inviting friends to dinner and showing them new and costly silverware.

Several days ago detectives heard that Markley was trying to sell three rugs. Posing as possible customers, officers asked to

see the rugs but Markley said they had already been sold. Yesterday Markley renewed efforts to sell three rugs and police, hearing of this, decided to arrest him, but he remained away from home all night and was not located until this morning.

When he was arrested Markley told contradicting stories to account for his new silverware and for the rugs, which officers said they found in his cellar.

The first paragraph is not libelous; the other paragraphs can be. Their information is not a matter of documented, official record; it is nothing but the opinion of individuals, and those opinions may be cruelly wrong. If Markley should be acquitted, he could sue for libel on the ground that paragraphs 2, 3, and 4 damaged him by suggesting strongly, and unofficially, that he was a thief. Yet newspapers often present the details of arrests, going far beyond the documented, official record. They do so because the information in the record gives little insight into the probable or potential importance of an arrest. That John Doe was arrested on an accusation of obtaining money under false pretenses does not show that he may be the man the police have sought for a year in connection with a long series of swindles. Only by going beyond the record can the paper put the arrest into focus. It does so, however, at its own peril; if it presents the *ex parte* and therefore prejudiced statements of the police as to why they made an arrest and the arrest turns out to be an error, the paper must pay the possible consequences.

Since this technically libelous matter cannot be made completely safe, the best course is to attribute it directly to its source, the police, and to emphasize that what the paper offers is the view and belief of the officers, printed because they are the most authoritative sources. "Police declare" and "Lieut. Mahoney said" show the newspaper's good faith in getting information as directly as possible, but they do not remove libel. At best, they soften it by showing that it was made without malicious intent.

Any doubtful identification should be given in qualified form. A man arrested for drunken driving shows an operator's permit and a registration certificate made out to John Doe. That man may have borrowed John Doe's car, and with it, of course, the registration. Doe, however, kept registration and driver's per-

mit in the same envelope, and when he loaned one he forgot to remove the other. The car borrower isn't too boozy to try to crawl out of his trouble by showing his friend's permit and trying to have the police and court record carry the friend's name rather than his own. Oh yes, this does happen, and sometimes at \$1,500 cost to the newspaper. When in doubt, the reporter writes, "The driver *identified himself as John Doe, 211 Zero Street.*"

#### COURT INFORMATION

What goes on in court can be reported safely, if the reporting be accurate, impartial, and complete, so long as the case genuinely was before the court. In most states, a case is not before the court until the judge begins his consideration. The filing with the court clerk of a lawsuit is "official" and usable to the extent of saying that "John Doe today entered suit against Richard Roe for \$25,000 damages, on grounds that Roe alienated the affections of Doe's wife." Details of the manner in which Roe is accused of making himself unduly attractive to Mrs. Doe cannot yet be printed except at the paper's risk. Before the case comes to the judge, those details may be modified or some of them dropped entirely.

"Yes, but the New York papers print those details as soon as an action is filed; they don't wait for the judge to enter the case." That is true, because New York is one of three states in which a case is considered to be truly before the court as soon as it is listed with the clerk. New York and Kentucky by precedent, rather than by statute, take this position. Only in Ohio is it written directly into the law. Elsewhere the rule is "details aren't privileged until the judge enters the case."

"Court" means "a court of record." Whether police court and justice of the peace court may be "of record" varies with the state, but the general view is that they are.

Conditional privilege—accurate, impartial, complete—goes with anything said in court if the judge admits it into the official record of the case. Any testimony that he allows to stand is conditionally privileged, but any that he orders expunged from the record is without privilege, since expunging is equivalent to ruling that

the testimony never was uttered. Whatever the attorneys say is conditionally privileged if relevant, or "on the track." This is a wise precaution, because some ax-grinding lawyers use a courtroom as a place for making mean and nasty digs at persons utterly unconnected with the case, or for referring to persons not involved in such a way as to stir sympathy for the lawyers' clients. John Doe is on trial on a charge of stealing bottles of milk from back porches. His lawyer, picturing him driven to theft by extreme poverty, hopes to strengthen the "sob picture" by showing how harshly Doe's employer has treated him.

Here was this poor man, trying to feed and clothe six children. He worked long, hard hours for old S. F.—Skinflint—Harper, who paid him the magnificent sum of \$14 a week. Fourteen dollars a week from grasping, greedy Harper, and trying to bring up a family on that pitiful amount.

Very touching, and perhaps very true, but S. F. Harper is not a party to this case at law. What the attorney says about him is irrelevant, and the newspaper can be challenged for printing it. Its only defense will be that what the lawyer said was true, and proving this may be thoroughly impossible. What the judge says, however relevant or however on a sidetrack, is conditionally privileged.

The central question regarding legislative news is: What is a legislature? Any body empowered to make and enforce rules binding upon the public is considered a legislative body. It may be a state assembly, county board, or city council. Public actions of legislative committees are conditionally privileged. Deliberations of private groups whose work is of high public concern usually are viewed as without privilege. The real-estate brokers' organization expels a member for grossly unethical conduct. A few court decisions hold such information conditionally privileged, because of its importance to the public, but the law is slow in adopting generally this view and the reporter asks the managing editor before he writes the story.

Whatever legislators say while they are on duty is conditionally privileged, but what they say when not acting officially has no

privilege. During the city council meeting Alderman French made unflattering remarks about Joel Pender who is demanding \$27,000 for the land the council wishes to acquire as part of a municipal golf course. These remarks, however untrue, are conditionally privileged. The meeting over, the reporter walks out with Alderman French.

"You surely lit into Joel Pender," the reporter says.

"Yes, and next time I'll say a lot more about that human buzzard. Why, he wouldn't let his grandmother pick dandelions off his lawn without paying him for the privilege." And so on for half a block, by which time Alderman French is at the zenith of epithet and denunciation. What he says during this stroll to the parked cars is without one shred of privilege, because he has ceased to be an "alderman in action" and once more is a private citizen.

The same distinction applies to utterances of other public officials. What the city attorney declares in formal decision upon a question presented to him for official interpretation is regarded as conditionally privileged, at least by precedent. What he says about a topic presented to him informally or unofficially is devoid of immunity. The city council officially asked the attorney to decide whether John Doe's chicken yard, behind his house on Orchard Street, violates the health laws. The attorney finds that emphatically it does and characterizes Doe as "criminally disregarding of the public health and safety." This is printable.

At Junctionville, the district attorney institutes action against a small-loans company which has become too much a loan shark. Hunting for a local end, a Middletown reporter asks the city attorney whether Middletown has any loan sharks. "I'm afraid we have, but they're clever enough we can't smoke them out. That Utopia Loan Company on Harrison Street is as crooked as they come, and as smart. The man who runs that outfit ought to be in the state pen." This is not an official statement made in line of duty; it is an answer to a private, that is, unofficial, question and it carries no privilege. Many such statements are printed, because their subjects are high in public interest and importance, but they remain potentially libelous.

## FAIR COMMENT

Comment is without libel if it be legally "fair." An architect draws a plan for a new city hall he would like to sell the municipality. He allows the paper to reproduce the drawing. The editorial page comments upon it as "ludicrous." The architect can sue, but his chance of recovering damages is slight. He offered that design to the public, thereby inviting judgment upon it, and thereby risking that the judgment might be unfavorable. Notice, however, that this judgment was about what the architect offered the public; it was not about the architect himself. To write, "This plan is fully as nonsensical as one could expect from a man whose only acceptable designs are ones he stole from his brother architects," is entirely different, because it is a reflection not upon that architect's professional work but upon him as a person. No artist, musician, writer, actor, politician, or anyone else is libeled by an unfavorable judgment if that judgment is limited to the actions the person put before the public for evaluation. Only when the criticism becomes "personal" does it risk becoming legally "unfair."

Candidate Doe tells a political rally that his opponent, Alderman Roe, has "voted consistently against the public interest and always in favor of big business." However he may resent this, Roe wastes his time if he sues the newspaper that printed Doe's remarks, because the criticism was about Roe's official actions and it is by these actions that the public must judge whether he is a good enough alderman to merit reelection. When Doe declares that "Alderman Roe voted to enlarge Brent Park because it meant his brother-in-law would get a fancy price for his land, and would cut him in on the graft," the newspaper repeats the accusation at its own risk, for this judgment is about Roe as a person as much as about Roe as an alderman. It introduces Roe's motives, and a person or publication attacking motives must be able to justify the attack or take the consequences. If Roe sued because of the first quotation, the newspaper's defense would be "fair comment"; if he sued because of the second, it would have to be "the truth"—and proving that might be extremely difficult.

## CONTEMPT OF COURT

One further danger faces the reporter; contempt of court. Printing testimony stricken from the record constitutes contempt, because the paper is proclaiming material the judge ruled as never having been uttered. This contingency arises rarely; a more common form of contempt is that of comment upon a case still in progress. When the case is ended, comment is allowable, but while it is in process comment is forbidden because it might influence and prejudice witnesses or even jurymen, though in an important case the newspapers probably would be kept from the jurymen. The trouble comes because a reporter wishes to make a case more meaningful by explaining the significance of the day's actions. He writes:

Hogan's testimony was so complicated that the jury obviously did not understand it. Only an engineer could understand his discussion of how an electric refrigerator could get out of commission. As a result his testimony, expected to be a mainstay in the defense, backfired and the jury's approval shifted to the prosecution which up to this time had been working under difficulties.

Such a writing would be objectionable because of its possible influence upon witnesses who have not yet taken the stand. A man scheduled to be heard tomorrow as a defense witness reads the story this afternoon and reacts in this wise: "Gosh, that Hogan fellow made a monkey of himself. I don't want to be written up like that. Hogan talked too much and they took him for a ride. When I get on that witness stand tomorrow all I'll say will be 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir.'" As a result, tomorrow's witness is abashed and uncommunicative and may withhold testimony of extreme importance.

## FEDERAL PROVISIONS

Every consideration mentioned so far roots into state law. The Federal law reaches into the newspaper office with a few trailers. The one most commonly noticed has to do with lotteries. If a person must pay to take part in a game of chance, that game is a lottery. He goes to an amusement park and pays a dime to toss little wooden rings over very large pegs. If he



succeeds, he is rewarded with a prize of an alarm clock, a set of almost-silver, or a couple of dozen china pieces. That is no lottery, for the game is not one of chance but of skill; if his aim is perfect, he can pitch the ring over the peg. Then he pays a quarter to visit the Summer Frolic of the North Side Merchants' Association. His admission ticket is torn in two; one part goes into a big drum and he retains the other piece. Late enough that everyone who might come can be expected to be present, one ticket-stub is drawn from the drum. The person holding the rest of the ticket with the same number as that on the stub gets a new set of tires, a ton of coal, or a week's supply of groceries. No skill was involved, nothing but the blindest of chance. And that's a lottery.

Many papers do not print the names of the lucky-number winners; others do use them. The decision is one of local policy, but when the names are used the Federal law has been broken. Naming the winners of a sweepstakes horserace also breaks the law. Every few years the post office department says "You'd better not do it" and the papers remember the law, though many of them forget it, as does the government, when the next sweepstakes are run. Since sweepstakes are foreign, they well may drop out of the picture during the Second World War. Sweepstakes are lotteries, because a person buying a ticket, that is, making a bet, has no assurance that his ticket counts. A few tickets are selected by lot as counting, but the other thousands of purchasers are denied any chance of getting back their money. American, or direct, betting on a horserace is gambling but not a lottery. Every bet counts, and there is no drawing to see which five out of 50,000 wagers have a chance of being a winner. If the bettor knows enough about horseflesh he can figure out which animal will win; thus he is betting "skillfully" and not "by chance," and it is allowable to tell about his form of gambling.

Four other better-nots are in the Federal code.

1. Better not present as a weather report or as a forecast that might be mistaken for a weather report any prediction made by other than a government meteorologist. The government has a monopoly upon the weather. This is as it should be, for to farmers, businessmen, and mariners tomorrow's weather can be of

extreme importance and to lead any of them into accepting some amateur's guess as the equivalent of the work of the government's professional and trained observers would be the rankest deceit.

2. Better not print pictures of money, postage stamps, or citizenship papers. Remote as the chances are, the engravings from which those pictures were made might come into felonious hands, or the pictures themselves might be used by counterfeiters. The government regards these three kinds of printing as so vitally important that it won't run even the slightest risk.

3. Better not indulge in indecency. How devoid of raiment a movie actress of the passionate order must be before a picture of her becomes indecent cannot be decided categorically.

In text, profanity and blasphemy are regarded as indecent and are deleted, even when the swearing is taken from court testimony. "Hell" and "damn" are the strongest expressions allowed, and they are reserved for highly special occasions.

4. Better not incite to sedition. In peace times, being seditious means to incite overthrow of the government by violence or give aid and comfort to a potential enemy. The report of a Communist meeting at which speakers shouted that "The gov't-ment's all wrong" would rarely come under the law, for the newspaper undoubtedly could show that its report was printed not with the aim of provoking violence but as an item in an impartial news coverage. What sedition will mean in wartime no one can say, for it will depend upon the height of the public hysteria that always accompanies war. The story of the Communist meeting might very well be regarded as seditious, assuming always that the Communists dared to cheep loudly enough for a reporter to hear.

Some newspapers have a fifth chance for an occasional worry. They have radios in their offices, the better to follow police calls and messages. Printing information taken from these calls contravenes the regulations of the Federal Communications Commission. Usually the police reporter picks up at the station or state police barracks the information that was on the air, and so there is no trouble, but once in a while the police radio carries something the reporter cannot obtain elsewhere. If that information is

used, the reporter does not mention its source. These occasions are happily few.

The last, final worry is about copyrighted material. The law's focus is that the borrowing of copyrighted material must not be so complete that it impedes the sales of the original matter. The *Journal* gets a thundering scoop, and copyrights it; the *Gazette* lifts the story, and announces it as copyrighted by the *Journal*. Copyright has been infringed, despite this announcement.

Bill the cub is happier when he reports for work next day.

"Chief, I don't think this libel business is too scary."

"Not too scary," the city editor agrees, "but don't start taking chances. If you can prove it hard enough that the jury has to admit you were right, the story's safe."

Not highly erudite, the city editor's summary, but eminently practical.

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## 23

### THE SECTIONAL STORY

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#### HURRY-UP WRITING

THE CITY COUNCIL, at a special meeting today, wrangled for an hour and a quarter, thereby giving Reporter Dave only half the time he needs to crackle out a story for the final edition.

Dave roars into the office on the run. "Mayor loses," he shouts to the city editor. "They ambushed him, even his own party. Hottest story out of city hall in a couple of years."

"In takes," the city editor commands. "Short ones."

Dave is at his desk, paper already rammed into the typewriter. He clacks the keys as fast as his fingers can flash. One paragraph done, he shouts, "Come and get it." In a metropolitan office, a copy boy would be standing beside him, to hurry that paragraph to the editing desk. Dave is in a plant small enough not to bother with copy boys, so another reporter, currently not too busy, seizes the fragment and runs it to the copy desk. In a moment Dave grunts, "'Nother," and the reporter snatches the second paragraph from him. The entire story makes a column, and Dave whips it through in one-paragraph chunks which sizzle across the editing desk and up to the composing room. There each chunk is given to a different typesetter, so that four or five operators can be working at the same time on different parts of the story. The first paragraph is in type before Dave has written the sixth.

When the grind is over, he relaxes and sighs heavily. "That's work." The cub, hovering near by and watching enviously this prodigious colleague who can work so fast, nods in awesome as-

sent. Indeed it must be a work of high emprise. The cub wishes he could do it.

Yet Dave is no phenomenon. He is merely an expert reporter putting on the pressure. Examine his methods and see how fundamentally simple they are.

First, he began writing that story before he got to the office. As he drove back from city hall, he planned the structure, so intently that he almost ran through a red light. When he raced up the office stairs he had the story outlined in his mind. Nothing remained but to write it.

He knew there would be no time to grind out the entire chronicle, examine and polish it, and perhaps rewrite a couple of paragraphs. With so few minutes before press time, the city editor would want a "sectional story," with each fragment snatched from Dave as soon as it was written. He had to write correctly the first time. Accordingly, he set aside all stylistic embellishments and pounded out copy in simple, most straightforward English, unadorned and drawing its power from its directness. This meant avoiding glittering phrasings, because it takes so much time to think of them.

#### EACH FRAGMENT IDENTIFIED

He began by giving the story a label, to be used on each fragment, so that the copy editor and the composing room men who must handle the various sections could verify their sequence. Labels are short, and since the story had the mayor as the pivotal character, Dave labeled, or slugged, it "Mayor." Atop that first paragraph he wrote "Lead Mayor" and at the end the warning "More."

The second paragraph was the first addition to the story, and the label on this take was written "Add 1 Mayor" or "First Add Mayor." The next section, of course, was "Add 2 Mayor" or "Second Add Mayor," and so on in continuity until the final paragraph, which in this case was "Add 14 Mayor." To emphasize that it was the very last, Dave slugged it "End All Mayor." Each section he concluded with the warning "More," except the last one which carried an end-mark, ##, to show that the chronicle finally was finished.

Dave was careful to use the same identification, "Mayor," for all parts of the series. If he slugged the paragraphs, "Mayor," "Mayor," "Vote," "Council," "Fight," the composing room would think that the parts belonged to four different stories and would prance itself into hysteria in trying to find the rest of the "Vote," "Council," and "Fight" accounts. A label carries through unchanged, no matter how long the story. Only in that fashion can confusion be avoided. If Dave had to write an accompanying chronicle, treating material allied to the main topic but not directly a part of it, he would show the relation between the main story and the correlative by such a label as "With Mayor" or "Folk Mayor."

He was punctilious with his arithmetic. If he jumped from "Add 6 Mayor" to "Add 8 Mayor," the composing room would verge upon the maniacal in its hunt for "Add 7 Mayor." The foreman would ask the make-up editor, who would ask the news editor, who would ask the city editor, who would ask Dave, who—five or six valuable minutes now lost irrevocably—finally would "guess" that he must have omitted "Add 7 Mayor."

Dave is careful to end a section only at the conclusion of a paragraph, never, never in the middle. Suppose the copy reader editing the story shouts to Dave to show some speed, and Dave becomes flustered. He writes in this fashion:

Add 9 Mayor

Alderman Hirsh shouted that \$2,500 was too much money to "take for granted" and that he demanded an accounting. "Don't be so fussy," Alderman Francis

—more—

Add 10 Mayor

shouted back. "Isn't the Mayor's word good enough for you?"

"Not this time," Hirsh retorted.

—more—

The copy editor should hold up that Add 9 Mayor because of its heretic ending, but if he too were excited he might send it to the composing room. Then the typesetter given Add 9 must end his fragment of a paragraph wherever it may come in the line, and it will be only the rarest luck that it will be at the right-hand margin. The operator given Add 10 Mayor has no choice but to start a

the left-hand margin. When the type is assembled, it looks like this:

Alderman Hirsh shouted that \$2,500 was too much money "to take for granted" and that he demanded an accounting. "Don't be so fussy," Alderman Francis shouted back. "Isn't the Mayor's word good enough for you?"

The "Alderman Francis" and "shouted back" lines probably won't confuse a reader, though they will be strange enough to suggest that something was out of gear, but all the printers will know exactly what happened. So will all the seasoned editorial workers, and they will voice their grief so loudly that Dave and the befogged copy editor will contemplate jumping into the lake. Dave avoids this unpleasant contingency by ending each section on a paragraph.

The sections are not always cut down to a single paragraph. They may run five or six paragraphs, depending how great may be the demand for speed. The greater the pressure, the shorter the section. The editorial room never invented a good name for story sections, so it sometimes borrows the composing room term, "take." This is an inaccuracy because the three-paragraph piece that the reporter writes as one section may be cut by a composing room executive into three takes.

#### THE FIRST SHALL BE LAST

Sometimes Dave writes a sectional story in inverted order, the lead coming last, either because he hasn't had time to phrase it or because the bit of information it will carry won't be known until later, although all else is available now. An accident story furnishes an example. The accident happened at 10:15 and all of it can be written now except the lead which will tell whether the man taken to the hospital has died. Instead of holding up the whole story, Dave writes all but the lead. Shortly before edition time he calls the hospital about the injured man's condition and then writes the lead.

The earlier-written part of the story he slugs "Add Wreck—Lead to Come." When he gets to the lead, he labels it "Lead

## CITY-HALL REPORTING

Wreck" and at the end puts the direction, "Pick Up Early" or "Pick Up Add Wreck."

Should the lead be long enough to require sectionalising, the top and bottom markings for each fragment would be:

Lead Wreck

—more—

Add 1 Lead Wreck

—more—

Add 2 Lead Wreck

—Pick Up Early—

A variation comes when the hospital reports that the injured man will "hang on for ten or twelve hours," but he dies with unexpected suddenness. Dave already has written a "seriously injured" story. Time is lacking to get back the story for revision; the best that can be done is to write a last-minute bit to be run in front of the story, probably in boldface, announcing the death. Dave labels this "Precede" or "Lead All."

## USING AND MISUSING PROOFS

General practice is to mark each part of a sectional story for a proof, as "Proof to Johnson." In that fashion, Johnson sees exactly how his story will appear in type and is able to call for corrections or changes, if time permits making them. When he wishes to splice new information into a section written earlier, he slugs the new bit as an "insert" and shows its sequence by letter rather than by number, as "Insert A," or "Insert B." "Add 2" and "Insert 2" might cause confusion. If he has the proof, Dave marks on it the place where the insert is to go and gives the proof to the copy desk for transmission to the composing room. If no proof has come down, he puts on the insert specific directions where in the story it is to go, as:

Insert A Wreck, after 4th pgh., "the coroner said."

Insert B Wreck, after 7th pgh., about Hunter being arrested.

Dave remembered the story clearly enough to tell in the quoted fragment how the fourth paragraph ended. He did not recall the final words of the seventh paragraph, but identified it by telling its content.



Proofs show a reporter's restraint or lack of it. Some reporters make themselves obnoxious by asking for wholesale changes in a story. To make those changes means throwing away the original type and replacing it by new metal, a slow process not to be inflicted blithely upon a composing room with so little time that it had to handle the story in sectional form. A reporter who wishes to replace type just because he has now thought of a slightly better phrasing has much to learn about making friends and influencing people.

When a change genuinely is demanded, the reporter tries to make the resulting new type fit the space occupied by the metal it replaces. The changes unhappily often will be in the top of the paragraph, and if the new metal doesn't fit, the whole paragraph must be recast to overcome the discrepancy. Here is the start of a paragraph:

Jackson said he was in Elon, N.D.,  
last week and then hitch-hiked east  
to Arlington, Ind., where he learned

The new information is that the North Dakota town should be Ellington, not Elon. "Ellington" is so much longer that it will overload the first line. To compensate, the reporter tries to shorten the second line enough to accommodate the overflow and thus allow picking up the third line unchanged:

Jackson said he was in Ellington,  
N.D., last week, then hitch-hiked east  
to Arlington, Ind., where he learned

This adjustment will be close enough to permit returning in the "Arlington" line to the original type.

Writing a sectional story, Dave avoids linking paragraphs by "Meanwhile" or "However." So far as he possibly can, he makes each paragraph a block or entity, to minimize the damage that may come if the composing room assembles the sections in wrong sequence, as now and then will happen, notably on a day when the apprentices are doing most of the make-up.

Sectional stories are infrequent. They cause no trouble if Dave puts aside any urge for fancy writing and if he remembers that every section must be identified with the same slugline and that each fragment must be given its proper number in the sequence.

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## 24

### SPORTS NEWS

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#### A CONGESTED FIELD

“**B**UR-R-R-T.” The city editor’s rolling of the “r” proclaims his vexation. “Bur-r-r-t. Where the Samhill is that fellow?”

“He was over in the sports room a minute ago,” someone volunteers.

“He would be,” the city editor growls. “I’m the one who pays him, but he tries to do all his work for sports.”

Burt isn’t hiding in the sports room because he hopes to duck an assignment; he is there because he never learned some of the journalistic verities. Mainly because he isn’t one, he thinks of the sports writer as newspapering’s most enviable personage.

Half the male members of each year’s freshman class in journalism school enter on the “Aims and Ambitions” line in the dossiers they fill out in the fall, “To write sport news” or “To be sports editor.” Of all the possible blind alleys, they are picking one of the narrowest and darkest. For a few writers, sports means freedom, fame, and opulence; for the majority it means monotony, anonymity, and a thin pocketbook.

This situation comes in part because sports writing is horribly overcrowded and replacements are too easy to find. Young men by the hundreds are well, or even expertly, informed about the “standard” sports, football, baseball, basketball, boxing. If a sports reporter quits because he is refused the raise he demanded, his place can be filled overnight by someone who knows at least as much as he does about the principal games.

The overcrowding is evident the moment the young hopeful

begins hunting a job. Eagerly he tells how much he knows of the "big four" sports. The editor is unimpressed. "Every sports writer has to know the 'big four,'" he retorts. "What have you for specialties?"

"Specialties?" the not-quite-so-hopeful murmurs.

"Yes. This is a hockey town. Do you know anything about hockey?"

"Well, no—but I could learn."

"Sorry, but I'm too busy to run a training school."

The youngster takes the hint and spends the rest of the day in the public library, soaking up everything he can read about hockey. Next day he tries the newspaper in a city 25 miles away.

"I know the 'big four' and something about hockey," he proclaims.

"Hockey?" the editor muses. "They play that on ice, don't they? Sorry, but we aren't a hockey town. Polo's the big stuff here. National Guard cavalry troop, you know, and lots of people follow the troop team."

That's the way of it. The sports editor assumes that an applicant knows the usual sports and looks for the man familiar with the one or two specialties popular in his city. The specialty of one town may be utterly unknown only a few miles away.

The manpower demand is relatively low. Except in the larger cities, all "national" sports such as league baseball and all except local college or high-school football and basketball are covered by the press associations. The Associated Press man who watches the Brooklyn 8, Giants 2 game writes for 1,400 newspapers. National sports are so highly covered that they leave the individual newspaper distressingly little space for home-grown sports and, ergo, little need for a large local staff.

Burt doesn't know it yet, but sports writing is ghastly monotonous. He worked with the college press bureau and handled the four home football, ten basketball, and eight baseball games. He didn't weary of it. Pitch him down now in a city with a Class B or C baseball team, four or five high-school nines, a score of semi-pro clubs, and uncountable sandlot leagues. He will write baseball every day from April to October. The games become all alike; he has had so much baseball pumped into him that the thud

of wood on leather is melancholy music. Yet day after day he must find vigorous, colorful ways of saying that someone hit a two-bagger and someone else struck out. Sports writing becomes as unpalatable as beans for dinner every night. Be it remembered that even the Bostonians eat beans but one day in seven.

"Granted, but I'm going to be a sports columnist like Henry McLemore," Burt protests. "I'll pick my sports as I please and not write about the same one each day."

Truly a way out, if Burt can arrange it. No use for him to knock at the doors of United Press, for the durable Mr. McLemore, at last reports, was in excellent health and hadn't gone in for perilous pastimes such as parachute jumping. Burt's only way will be to write a column for some one paper and to make that column scintillate so brightly that finally *The New York Times* beckons him to understudy for John Kieran. The *Times* hasn't yet shown such an inclination. Worse, until he is an "old timer," Burt is likely to find that writing a column is impossible, because the sports editor has that as his own province and refuses to share it. Unless he's lucky enough to make the law of averages blink, Burt will find sports writing means a long, dusty tute-lage of routine work.

Burt's best escape will be to develop some reasonably broad specialty, such as high-school sports. Many a paper puts one man on the high schools and has him follow them from football through baseball. Here Burt will have a chance to develop such a clientele of readers that his own market price rises. But it isn't a sure-fire chance.

#### TRY THE BINGVILLE "BUGLE"

Only if he goes to a small-city paper does sports offer much latitude. The paper in a town of 20,000 probably has one man doing sports, as a part-time chore. He clips three or four columns of copy from the wire, watches an occasional local contest, and picks up most of his home-town information from team managers and coaches who volunteer to keep him more or less informed. Burt indeed may be able to assist in this somewhat desultory effort, and, welcomely soon, to take it over entirely. It will remain a half-portion job until he has built a new-model sports page

that sets the city agog. Only then will he be told to "Give sports all your time." Even so, this is probably Burt's quickest chance to make a name for himself.

This is not for a moment to say that the sports page is a poor-relation department of the newspaper. It is one of the best circulation builders ever devised. During the early 1930's when every other department was sliced so that the paper could harmonize with its undernourished advertising revenue, sports kept its accustomed full page, or two pages, or four pages. Everyone agreed that, "You can't cut sports."

The early sports writers were not newspapermen; they were barroom brawlers and pool-hall toughs. They lived in a different and much dirtier world. When the sporting news was elevated about 1910, to the importance of a separate newspaper department, these gutter-swimmers were doomed. A department emphasized so much simply could not be trusted to riffraff. A genuine newspaperman was detached from the city staff, commiserated, and told to take charge of the new sports department. He was a lonely soul, and when a pool-haller dropped out, the editor replaced him with a newspaperman.

One by one the touts disappeared, though certain of their influences are fading only now. Today's sports writers are genuine newspapermen and some are among the profession's most brilliant.

Because of its undistinguished early ancestry, the sports department didn't know where it was going. The amazing popularity of sports news was bewildering. Thousands of persons who never played baseball read avidly about it; the old notion that sports news was for sports players crumbled. Then it was discovered that every layer in the population followed sports. The plug-uglies went to boxing matches in the hope of seeing someone battered insensible no more eagerly than the minister went to the golf course to try once more to bring his score below 115. Someone discovered that thousands of persons, many of them adults, watched high-school football games and that thousands more read about them. Women not only began playing but began reading. Many persons who neither played nor watched games followed the sports page.

## DIVERSITY IS ESSENTIAL

Obviously, a sports page that appealed to a single group of readers could not justify the expense of the new department. Every group, players, watchers, school children, parents, women, had to be attracted if the sports page was to retain its place. Moreover, sports that had been little were becoming big. Golf, once to be snickered at, became a national mania.

While the sports staffs were searching for a formula, the press associations gave them one. The associations could do little with local or county sports, so they reached for state and national sports, thereby providing stories of at least some interest in every office in the region. Inevitably, they gave professional sports the emphasis. The Philadelphia Athletics played better ball than did the University of Pennsylvania team and were accordingly much easier to popularize. With the straight news came feature stories, behind-the-scenes gossip, forecasts of the week ahead, and explanations why the batting averages tumbled last week. Then the colleges saw how much money the professional sports, well lubricated with publicity, were making. The colleges built stadia seating thousands of persons and hired publicity writers to make the teams so interesting that customers would come in droves. The wires offered as much professional sports as before, and gave the colleges enormously increased space. As a result, a sports editor could fill a page with what he clipped from the telegraph machine. Unless he was ambitious, he could avoid rustling for local sports news. Too many sports pages today tell about prize fighting and coast-to-coast football but are shamefacedly silent about the local schoolmarm who made an eagle on the Fair Oaks course or the local garageman who bowled 136 with the duckpins.

Out of the confusion, four fundamentals are emerging:

1. Sports must be written for a wide and varied audience. This involves a study of the individual city, for what is popular in one town may be uninteresting in another. A main distinction is between the metropolis and the small city. Few in the metropolis actually play; most of the readers are watchers rather than participants. Ergo, the sports most interesting to watch are likely to be emphasized. In the smaller city, a much greater pro-

portion of readers also play games. It's a dreary town that lacks its ten or eleven softball leagues. The Barnett store team whacks the Marshall garage team, 17 to 12, in a "muni" league game seen by 150 persons, but every one of the 150 and every player will read the paper to see what it said about the game, which thereby becomes at least as deserving as the account of the Bees' 6 to 1 conquest of the Dodgers, seen by 8,000, of whom not one was from the paper's city.

2. Sports have reacted to the radio. In the days when automobiles boasted of forty-mile speed, only the people who saw the game knew the score until the paper appeared. An expository, play-by-play story served excellently. Today all big games and many of only modest importance are broadcast and readers know long before they pick up the paper that Notre Dame won by another whirlwind fourth quarter in which a young "Irishman" named Moscicki or Santaniello made two touchdowns in five minutes. The newspaper story, accordingly, tends to concentrate the play-by-play to the few moments that determined the outcome and to give much of its space to analysis and interpretation, explaining how plays were made rather than saying merely that such-and-such was done.

3. Sports-department ethics are catching up with those in the rest of the paper. Early in 1939, several Pacific coast sports writers were discharged on accusations that they had accepted money from professional sports promoters, apparently for doctoring their stories so that the customers would be lured to swarming through the turnstiles. For years a writer in any other department who took outside money faced instant dismissal, but sports was an exception. A sports reporter was publicity man for the boxing or wrestling arena and no one did anything about it. Lately, however, the word has been going around, "Don't." This is entirely as it should be. The reporter who writes on Monday that "the card Wednesday night will provide four of the fastest bouts ever seen in this city" is in poor position to say in Thursday's edition that "last night's bouts were so slow that the only noise was that of the crowd's snores."

One problem remains largely unsolved: what to do about the gambling pools which have fostered such an interest in forecasts

of victors. Every Friday the sports editor presents his guesses for tomorrow's football games, together with much loud back-slapping that "this column last week picked thirty-nine winners and only eleven losers." The pools are everywhere, in drug stores, barber shops, business offices, filling stations, and factories. Some companies post large notices that anyone soliciting for pools will be discharged instantly, but always five or six employees pad their earnings with commissions made by selling pool bets. The sports page has not found a way to satisfy legitimate curiosity as to probable victors without at the same time abetting the gambling craze.

4. Sports can be written in English. The jargon that fills the sloppy sports page is a direct and traceable result of the reporter's weariness. He has seen and written about baseball games each workday for the last five weeks. He has used the same old words and described the same old situations until he is ready to gibber. He has written "ball," "ball," "ball," "ball" until his nerves are frazzled, but men keep on doing things with and to a ball and he must keep on writing. For his own psychological relief, he reaches for new ways of saying "ball." He calls it a "sphere," a "horsehide," a "cherry," and a "pebble."

"There," he exults, "we've captured some new language." A colleague remarks, "Nice line you had, that one about the 'mischievous missile.'" From that day on, Burt would rather starve than call a ball a ball. He develops an intricate, grotesque vocabulary that only a tenacious reader, who has seen that vocabulary grow, can comprehend.

#### ADOLESCENT ETHICS

Three other fundamentals are maturing but haven't yet attained their majority.

The first is realization that the conflict sports, such as boxing and wrestling, are hurt rather than helped by emphasis upon blood and battering.

The six-round go between Baldy Shance and Larry Lewis will be a grudge fight, with each man ready to forget as many of the rules as the referee will let him. Both boys will be ready to take each other apart. It will be one of the most vicious, knock 'em dead fights the Arena has staged in a long while.



Such a story will bring to the Arena spectators who hope to see someone hurt, but plenty of other readers will wonder whether that crackpot state senator who tried to get the last legislature to outlaw prize fights wasn't on the right track, after all. Many papers have outgrown the gore story, but the improvement is not universal.

The second hopeful sign is the decline of sneering at amateurs. In some sports, notably boxing, a good college or other amateur show is likely to be of higher caliber than many professional encounters. Sports writers also are realizing that the amateur, a part-time player, isn't to be judged by the same inflexible standards as is the professional who makes his living at the game. The high-school halfback who stands frozen for forty seconds until three tacklers hit him as he looks for someone who can receive a pass hadn't been in such a frightening position more than once or twice before. To call him "brainless" is cruel. Even the professional halfback, with eight to a dozen years of football experience behind him, who stood statuelike until someone knocked him down doesn't deserve the language's most torrid epithets.

This entire situation ties into the third and least hopeful item, that of overemphasis upon victory. The law of averages dictates that a team should lose half its games, except for an occasional tie, unless it always plays markedly weaker opponents. Some sports writers never heard of the law of averages. To them a team defeated is a team disgraced, and they have hammered on this idea until too many readers believe it.

Coach Knobby Sanderson's boys have their last chance tomorrow to keep the season from being the most disastrous in 10 years. With a record of only three victories against four defeats, Sanderson's team has an even chance to win tomorrow. If they do win, Sanderson can feel safe, but if they lose, the demand for a new coach, already heard on all sides, will become a loud roar.

Late in the game, Sanderson's team trails by two points. On the bench is Jack Hines, broken field runner with antelope speed, but now nursing a badly injured ankle. One more twisting and Jack will spend a long time in the hospital.

"How's the old peg feel, Jack?"

"Pretty good, Knobby. Four minutes to play, and she's good for that much."

If Jack breaks loose just once, for all that his current speed is reduced by the bad ankle, the resultant touchdown wins the game. If Jack gets spilled, hard, and that ankle is mauled—Sanderson has a family and he knows that a coach fired because his team lost too often is lucky to get even a freshwater high school job. Sanderson is indeed an iron man if he can resist saying, "Go in, Jack, and carry that ball."

Jack, in his turn, has read stories that said:

When Hines is in form, the Terriers win; when he is on the bench, they lose. If he can nurse his bad leg another four weeks, the Sandersonmen will have a fairly good season, but if he stays on the bench Knobby can expect bad news and nothing else.

"I've been hurt already," Jack tells himself. "My turn won't come again for a long time. Besides, the team needs me." Surely the team needs him if it is to win games, but does it need to win games enough for him to risk permanent injury and perhaps amputation?

In the past the newspapers made victory so demanding that Jack thought it treason to admit that he had been injured and needed to recuperate. They aren't doing it so much today, but there is nonetheless ample room for further betterment.

A common offense was to light the fires of ridicule under the little team trampled by a big one. Atherton College with 337 students, 145 of them co-eds, and with a freshmen-can't-play eligibility rule, was glad to get on the state university's schedule, because the university, with 7,500 students, offered a guarantee large enough to pay Atherton's deficits in other sports. The Atherton boys, all eighteen of them, were scrappy bulldogs but they began to weary when State put in its third team, then its fourth, and finally its fifth. The score by periods was State 6, 13, 20, 18. The Atherton cheering section sang "Alma Mater" hoarsely and then sneaked out of town. The Sunday paper referred to Atherton's "kindergarten team of Rip Van Winkles." Too bad the literature-soaked sports writer never heard of Bala-klava. This particular form of intolerance is waning, but no

mercy has been extended yet to the coach who runs into two years of skim-milk material and whose teams accordingly are far below their usual power.

Slim progress has been made in differentiating between the coach and the team. The Terriers are the Sandersonmen and the Tornadoes are the Fostermen. If the team wins, the coach gets the glory; if the team loses, he gets the condemnation. When laments are loud about the professionalizing of college games, the sports writers might ponder their own responsibility for building athletics into a business.

All these points indicate that sports writing has yet to reach the quality level of the rest of the newspaper. Improvement is being made, but too slowly. Meantime the Second World War has damaged the sports page by filling it with military terms. The Terriers' air game is, strangely, "torpedoed" and the Tornadoes make a determined stand on their 14-yard "salient." The Beavers begin a touchdown "offensive" and the Azure Aces "blitzkrieg" passes all over the field. The military language is one of action, and therefore readily transferable to sports writing, but so many writers have made the transfer that the army vocabulary is worn out. The Second World War was less than a month old when a press association sent this warning to its men:

Let's leave the war to the front pages and quit using military expressions in football copy. Ones such as "lightning war" showed up Saturday night. Newspaper readers turn to sports pages to get away from the war.

Sage advice, this.

#### FOUR REQUIREMENTS

Writing sports news involves four main points: (1) Accuracy; (2) Fairness; (3) Analysis; (4) Structure.

Enough readers saw the game and enough know so much about the sport that an erroneous statement will be spotted at once. Why was a penalty given in a football game? An official explains by means of signals. The reporter has no excuse for having to guess why the home team lost five yards; he should know the signal code. He should know also how to keep box scores for the various games. He announces the Terriers' basketball

team as beating the Tornadoes 24 to 19, but his box score accounts for only 23 Terrier points. Dozens of readers checked his figures and discovered the inaccuracy.

Fairness means, in effect, "don't turn a defeat for the home team into a 'moral victory.'" Some reporters believe that the visitors never win because of being the better team, but only because the luck froze or the officials decided everything the wrong way. This may be a welcome excuse to a certain element of readers, but many are sportsmen enough to resent it strongly.

Structure demands planning a story so that the readers can anticipate what is coming next. Four touchdowns were scored. Immediately after the lead, the story explains compactly how three touchdowns were made and then goes into a play-by-play account. Mystified readers wonder why that fourth touchdown wasn't listed in the summary.

Analysis is the newspaper's best way of catching up with the radio's spot story, but analysis is far more than random guessing. It is built upon unremitting attention to the details of the game. The reporter knows that he will have only 500 words for his story. For six minutes the ball seesaws; nothing violent happens and the reporter watches the crowd and the sky, since these minutes assuredly will contribute nothing worth crowbarring into his half-column story. In the seventh minute the Terriers uncork a pass that carries for a touchdown. The reporter writes of a "sudden, unexpected air attack," but 18,000 of the persons who saw the game realize that it is a direct result of the six minutes of seesawing, during which the Terrier quarterback found how and when he could suck the Tornado right halfback out of position. Those 18,000 persons will sniff when the newspaper next day tells of the "sudden" maneuver. Good analysis makes a story; poor analysis kills it.

The lead has five possibilities for material. It is a summary intended for the casual reader who will not follow the story unless it inveigles him. The five possibilities are:

1. How the scores were made and by whom:

Coming to life for two minutes in the third quarter, the Atherton Terriers marched 64 yards in four plays to beat the Burnham Tor-

nadoes, 6 to 0, yesterday afternoon at Atherton field. The rest of the game was listless, but those four plays saw George Hardy carry the ball 17 yards, Fred Hinckley smash the line for 11, and Bill O'Brien sweep around left end for 23. Then a pass, O'Brien to Jack Davey, made the final 13 yards and the touchdown.

2. A tie-in between the result of the game and the features which produced that result:

Atherton 4, Burnham 3, in 14 innings.

It looks like one of those old-fashioned pitchers' battles, but it wasn't. Atherton scored one run in each of the first three innings in yesterday's game at Atherton field, each team got at least one man on base in each of the next three innings, which were scoreless, and then Burnham tallied once in the seventh, again in the eighth, and once more in the ninth.

From the ninth to the 13th, every inning saw men on base, and nobody struck out. Atherton had to bunch three singles in the 14th to win. Atherton used four pitchers and Burnham employed two.

Certainly a game like that isn't a pitchers' duel.

3. A comparison of the teams and players:

Burnham's basketball team came to Atherton gymnasium last night and won a 31 to 26 game in which short, chunky forwards who didn't shoot until they were close to the basket had the edge throughout on tall, lanky fellows who let fly from anywhere on the floor.

Burnham's Dick Butler and Clyde Haskins were as conservative as bank presidents. They worked the ball up close before they looped it. They made 11 of their team's 13 field goals, and they missed only nine shots. Atherton's Bill Rand and Harry Morse tried long shots. They accounted for eight of Atherton's 11 field goals, but they missed the basket 27 times.

Notice, incidentally, how loaded this lead is with specific material.

4. A focusing upon the stars—if any players deserve such prominence—with an explanation how they starred:

The Atherton college tennis team turned back Burnham, 4 to 3, yesterday on the home courts, largely because Bill Yardley couldn't be stopped. The lanky sophomore romped away with his singles match, 6-1, 6-1, and then dominated the deciding doubles match to win 6-3, 6-1.

Yardley trusted all to his net rushing tactics, and won the gamble handily. At the net he was a whirling dervish, smashing, blocking, and smashing again. He won because his long reach and quick reaction consistently kept him in attacking territory.

#### 5. A picture of the crowd:

More than 16,000 persons clogged Atherton field yesterday afternoon to see a resolute Burnham football team hammer out a 21 to 12 victory. It was the largest crowd ever to cram into the stadium, and it had more lung-power than some throngs of twice its size. Burnham calls signals instead of using the huddle, and time after time the officials had to motion the crowd to be quiet enough so that the quarterback could be heard.

Fifteen years ago a football game was a contest; today it is a contest plus a between-the-halves spectacle. Gaudily uniformed bands stepping through intricate maneuvers put on a show sometimes more interesting than is the game.

Since a lead need not be cramped into a single paragraph, more than one item often can be used. The lead's main duty is to give the "tone" for the rest of the story with, generally, a high-spotting of the principal plays of the game. If this second work cannot be put at the top of the story, it follows as a secondary lead. In the example immediately preceding, the lead tells nothing of the way the scores were made; that information would come in the secondary lead.

Only after the lead, or the lead and secondary lead, does the fan become more important than the casual reader. The running story is the "detailed account," already forecast in the lead. It is narrative and chronological and, above all, it follows a structure. Usually each play is described in a single sentence, for the benefit of clarity. Some plays will be intricate enough to require long sentences, thereby giving variety in sentence length.

When the running story does not permit describing every play, the reporter must establish a standard for judging how significant a play must be to receive mention. This requires allotting his space logically. Otherwise, he recounts eight plays in the first period, and comes to the final quarter, in which three touchdowns were scored, with only enough wordage left for two plays.

The final element is the table or box score, about which there

are two injunctions: (1) make sure the score adds correctly; (2) follow the paper's style sheet meticulously. Some papers list the errors in a baseball game up with the at-bat, hits, runs, and put-outs; others drop the errors into the summary that follows the line-up. Whatever the style sheet dictates is to be observed. Setting box scores is hard work for a linotyper. He learns the paper's method and builds a skill in piecing an enormous amount of information into a mere dab of space. To ask him to set a box score containing one more column than usual demands that he refigure each and every space adjustment. It will take him twice as long.

Story structure often resolves into the familiar "lead and secondary lead" arrangement which divides into blocks. As an illustration, consider the story of a boxing program of four matches. The division into blocks:

*(Block 1: The lead; statement of the result of the most interesting fight, with the five W's and with a compact account of the decisive moments of the fight)*

Sammy Frayne, local heavyweight, knocked out Terrier Ryan, Jersey City, in the sixth round of their eight-round fight, top spot on last night's four-battle program at the Arena.

More than 900 persons watched Frayne start so slowly that he lost the first two rounds on points, break even in the third and fourth, and then hammer the tiring Ryan in the fifth and sixth. Frayne tumbled Ryan twice in the sixth, once for an eight-count, and a moment later for the knockout. Ryan tried to pull to his feet the second time, but fell back on the canvas and Referee Art Dowd counted him out.

*(Block 2: Secondary lead)*

Battling Burkett, Harmons ville middleweight, outpointed Joe Murch, Capital City, in their four-round bout, which opened the show and was the fastest fight of the night. Dave Green, Pantonsburg, had an easy time outpointing Tom Juggler, Greenville, in the six-round bout before the star fight. Green led in every round, though he never had Juggler in danger of being knocked out. Both boys weighed in at 168 pounds. Bill Daisch, Greenville bantamweight, trifled through four slow rounds with Andy Hunt, local lad, and opened up only in the final frame when he drove Hunt to the ropes three times and won a technical knockout.

*(Block 3: The catch-all)*

Next week's program will offer two bantam and two heavyweight

matches, Manager Karl Frost announced. Jerry Sullivan and Bill Winch, local heavies, will collide in a six-rounder, their third meeting at the Arena. Sullivan won both their other battles on points.

*(Block 4: Elaboration of the lead, following the sequence of action indicated in the lead)*

Frayne and Ryan dilly-dallied in the first two rounds, with neither man venturing an attack. Ryan took the lead in the few moments of anything approaching action. Frayne was content to keep the Terrier from hurting him, but Ryan landed most of the few blows that were struck and led easily on points.

The third round saw Frayne come to life and push Ryan to the ropes twice in the first minute. Then the Terrier released an attack that had Frayne on the defensive. In the fourth round Frayne forced the fighting as Ryan showed signs of tiring. Frayne bored in at the Terrier's midsection and the round ended with Ryan retreating constantly.

Frayne had everything his own way in the fifth and pushed Ryan into the ropes four times, but never jarred him off his feet. Ryan was collapsing rapidly, and made only a few momentary attempts to attack.

The sixth opened with Frayne dropping Ryan with a direct left to the chin. Ryan, dazed, got up sooner than necessary and tried to counterattack. He swung wildly, lost his balance, and forgot to guard. Frayne took his time and let Ryan set himself up for a smash. Frayne gave it to him in a smacking one-two to the head. The Terrier dropped, rose almost to his knees, and dropped back to the floor. He had to be helped from the ring.

*(Block 5: Elaboration of the secondary lead, with each fight described in the sequence of its listing in the secondary lead)*

Burkett and Murch were clumsy but willing. The boys threw punches every moment. Few of them landed but the action never slackened. Burkett had Murch in trouble in the third, when a series of pokes to the midriff backed Joe into the ropes. The round ended with Murch almost running away. He rallied in the final, but Burkett had too much of a lead, mainly from the third round, to be overtaken.

For six rounds Dave Green hit Tom Juggler whenever he wanted to, but the Pantonsburg boy had no power in his punches and rocked the Greenville lad only twice. Juggler made a showing in the fifth for a moment and forced Green to retreat, but the rally was over in a few seconds. Juggler's face was blood-smeared when the fight ended and he was cut over the right eye, but at no time was he in danger of being floored.



Daisch and Hunt were cautious all the way and fought on listlessly even terms until the last round. Then Daisch began swinging hard for Hunt's jaw. He left himself wide open most of the time but Hunt failed to take advantage of the chances. Hunt was driven into the ropes three times. There he tried to push Daisch away but on the third retreat Hunt lost his head and Daisch hit him with almost every blow. Finally Art Dowd stopped the fight and awarded Daisch a TKO.

### THE PROPHET

When Burt finally deserts the city staff for the sports department, he exults at the chance for "dope writing" in which, on Thursday, he predicts how Saturday's game will develop and why. He speculates that "The Terriers will be twice as dangerous this week, because their pass attack has been strengthened so much. Frank King and Red Doyle have been zooming out thirty-yard heaves, with Al Franklin and Bill Burnett grabbing them as easily as a Scotchman freezes on to a ten-dollar bill. Coach Knobby Sanderson now can shift from punch plays to a change of pace system, which will give his light but scrappy backfield a relief from the hammering it has taken in the first two games of the season."

Splendid stuff this, if justified. But who, pray, is Burt? Why, he's a fellow who has watched the Terriers practice for three days. His guessing may be rickety. Speculation, based upon long and expert observation, is one thing; speculation originating mainly in the northmost county of a new reporter's mind is entirely another. When done by a writer so recognized as an authority that his by-line has sales value, speculation is excellent. Until he is such an authority, Burt remains a reporter and writes that the Terriers this week are stressing the forward pass but does not predict how well they will use it on Saturday.

Nothing said heretofore indicts the intelligent use of slang. Slang by an expert is one of the beauties of English, as Shakespeare so incontrovertibly demonstrated when he inserted into the language expressions still in active use. Slang by an imitator or even by an originator who cannot devise "natural slang" is barbaric. Much of the trouble comes from the fact that a new

phrasing is so widely adopted that it is worked to death in a week. An alert sports writer tagged an unusually pugnacious prize-fighter as "Homicide Henry," thereby explaining the pugilist in detail. Half the other sports writers from the Atlantic Salem to the Pacific picked up "Homicide Henry" and used the phrase incessantly. It wore out within a fortnight.

Slang that forces readers to stop and decode it is weak, because it limits the appeal of the sports page. Readers must have one language for the rest of the paper and a second for the sports page. An appreciable number won't do it; they forego the sports news.

Fighting the monotony of sports routine is more than a matter of finding a new vocabulary; it is a matter also of devising new story themes. Burt is on his sixty-sixth baseball game, and wishes heartily that he were back on P. T. A. stories. Suddenly he realizes that this game is so conservative that it's soporific. Nobody takes a chance. Joe Ellis rams a hit that should be good for a double, but he halts timidly on first base. "Conservative . . . cautious," Burt ruminates. "Cautious as what? Cautious as scared rabbits. There's a peg to hang the whole story on."

Certainly; Burt likens the ball teams to cottontails and writes of Joe Ellis nibbling the grass near first base instead of taking a healthy lead off the bag.

Burt avoids too much "technical writing." It shows off grandly what he knows but it limits the number of his readers. How many readers avoid tennis stories because no sports writer ever explains what a "seeded draw" may be, and how many, many others are baffled by football stories that refer nonchalantly to "single wingback formations"? Where Burt uses terms familiar only to fans, he explains them compactly for the casual readers. The fans won't object, and the general readers will be clamorously appreciative.

One last danger entices Burt, that of imitating some other sports writer whose copy seems admirable. Likely enough it is, because it represents a style of writing that the other fellow has cultivated until he can use it effectively. If Burt borrows it, it loses in the process. He will be more successful with his own

style, for all that it seems to sparkle less. Burt doesn't know the other writer's method, he hasn't tinkered with it and learned its powers and its pitfalls. Adopting it puts him in the unhappy situation of the chap who learned to drive a motorcycle and then tried to manage a trailer-truck.

### THE SPORTS COLUMN

Finally the sports editor goes on vacation and Burt temporarily commands the department. "How about your column, Ed? Want me to keep it going for you?"

"Better let it go, Burt."

"All right for me to try one of my own, with a different slant from yours?"

Ed has fourteen minutes in which to catch his train. "All right, get it out of your system."

Before Burt goes ahead he has two principles to pound into mind. The first is variety. The column must not be all baseball, all golf, or all anything else. It must be diversified, or it will have only the readers interested in the few sports it mentions. From September to November, sports columns are ninety-six per cent football, yet during that period the duck-hunting season opens and thousands of gunners risk pneumonia and drowning for a couple of shots. The sports editor is too immersed with football to think about duck hunting. The city editor smiles and uses the mallards and the canvasbacks for his own pages.

The second point is that of tolerance. Because some sports writers, notably Westbrook Pegler and John R. Tunis, built such reputations with invective that they could escape from writing sports, Burt prepares to pour on the acid. Someone writes in that Harvard could topple State by at least three touchdowns and Burt ridicules both the idea and its sponsor. The sponsor and his friends will be peevish for weeks. To disagree is Burt's privilege, and to disagree vigorously, but to brand the other fellow as a murkywit cheapens the column and stirs resentment against the paper. One columnist in a college town flaunted his omniscience by telling how the local crew would outrow Cornell. Some readers haven't yet stopped tittering at his references to "Ithica."

Does sports writing offer an opportunity to women? It should, and a few papers are experimenting with women writers. Women bowlers, women golfers, women's softball teams, women tennis players, women rifle and trap shooters, women swimmers, women skiers, women anglers, certainly their numbers are great enough now to demand, let alone to justify, sports news written by women. The day is coming, and when it does the cigaret smoke in the sports room won't be so thick as it is now, but Burt will see the sports page even more eagerly read than it is today.

SOCIETY NEWS

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## A MOST VALUABLE PAGE

“**F**RIGHTFUL STUFF, isn’t it?” the cub asks, holding up the society page. “If I were managing editor, all this about who was there and what she wore would go in the wastebasket. And the idea of wasting Inez on this stuff when she could be writing real news. . . .”

Yes, the cub is very, very green. He still believes that only the page 1 stories with heavy, black headlines are worth printing. No one has told him the society page is one of the most attentively read in the entire paper, that it is an important factor in gaining and holding circulation, and, best of all, that it is of high appeal no matter what the size of the city.

The little-city and the big-city society pages are greatly different. The metropolitan page tells about the socially elect, the folk who can be comfortable in evening gowns or boiled shirts, “the people who count.” They, and they alone, are mentioned, regardless of who may be the paper’s readers. The dignified, conservative newspaper goes into the homes of these aristocratic residents, who read about themselves. The average papers and the raucous, blatant ones go to the ordinary housewives, the high-school girls, and the store clerks who have the fascination of seeing how the supposedly enviable top-flighters conduct themselves.

Limiting its purview to the “genuine society” is a wise step for the metropolitan newspaper. The big city has so much pseudo-society that covering it would gobble too much space. Then, too, metropolitan readers care little about their own groups; they

aren't interested in the Ladies' Aid Society of the Sixteenth Avenue Congregational Church. They wish to know about the unusual, and in social matters the unusual are "the 400."

This situation vanishes in the small city. It has little "real" society to be distinguished from the "pseudo" kind. The persons mentioned on the society page are very ordinary mortals, with the small-townners' interest in their neighbors. These people read the society page, not for their daily "glimpse of heaven," but to see what their friends and acquaintances are doing. Those doings may be colossally unimportant, but they are good copy. The society page is the place where the individual becomes important, and that is a basic reason why the page is popular. It is the reader's best chance to see his own name in print.

The society editor in the smaller city usually is a girl, often one making her first step in newspaper work. She likes it immensely or she hates it ardently. Like Inez, she is the most capable girl on the staff, for a society page disintegrates almost overnight if it is mismanaged. The work is loaded with routine, yet it is not so static that it never changes. In many a city the last fifteen years have brought a great change in society news. Where once the page presented mainly jottings about the "first families," it now gives much, or most, of its attention to clubs and societies. At first the Woman's Club and the College Club alone received mention, but now the Railroad Women's Club and the Conversational Society affairs are recounted.

#### THE OPPORTUNITY PAGE

The society page is a splendid chance for Inez to show her quality, and quickly. If she succeeds a good editor, Inez wins early recognition for her ability to keep the page pegged to the standard set by her predecessor. Inez must be good, else the page collapses within three months. If she succeeds a weak editor, the new quality Inez builds into the page will be noticed quickly.

Inez has various worries. Like the sports writer, she is worn down by monotony. Day after day she writes the same stories, differing only in names and addresses. Weddings are horribly standardized; when she has written six of them, she has written them all.

Constantly she is in danger of being duped by a fake announcement of a wedding or an engagement. Every city has its fools and perverts who delight in trying to trick the paper into announcing that two persons who have never met each other have become engaged. Inez has it as an ironclad, unalterable rule that every marital tiding must be verified before it goes into the paper. She simply cannot take a chance.

Getting names and addresses correctly is a perpetual worry, made the greater because she obtains so much information by telephone. Over the wire "Burpee" can sound completely like "Durkee." She never guesses at an unfamiliar name; she looks it up. "Mrs. Harrie B. Young" may be completely correct, and it may indeed be "Miss Jennie Bill" rather than "Miss Bull."

Her biggest job is that of getting the news. The city editor has a staff of reporters, but Inez works alone. She will succeed only if she is as systematic as is the city editor. Random, hope-for-the-best methods will give her an incomplete and lopsided picture of her territory.

Accordingly, Inez welcomes the publicity chairmen from the clubs. Terrifically earnest, these helpful souls simply cannot understand that a club election, held Monday, should be in the paper before Friday. "I was going to bring that in to you tomorrow." Rallying her utmost diplomacy, Inez lures, wheedles, entices, and cajoles the publicity chairmen into making their reports more promptly.

Inez keeps a future book with the full meticulousness of the most fussy city editor. Without such a reference book she will overlook many and important happenings, because there are too many of them to be trusted to the unaided memory. Even a small city may have fifty or more clubs and other women's organizations. Inez may learn them thoroughly enough to know when each holds its regular meetings, but only a future book will keep her straight on special meetings, changes in programs, and even regular meetings of more than usual news worth.

The Sixteen Acres Federated Church Woman's Club discovers a new member who was in London when the Second World War erupted and hastily schedules her to address the meeting on February 6, originally listed for "Flowers and Songs of the

Orient." To Inez the S. A. F. C. W. C. means a two-paragraph story, but this meeting may produce half-column news. "Feb. 6," Inez warns herself, "I'll have to remember that." Unless she records it in the future book, she will recollect about February 16 that something interesting was scheduled for somewhere about this time, but that will be all she will remember. The future book is one of her two main reliances.

#### GETTING THE PERSONALS

The other principal reliance is a system for obtaining the personal items, the trivia about "Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Jackson, 218 Forsyth Street, will go to Indianapolis Saturday to visit Mrs. Jackson's brother-in-law and sister, Mr. and Mrs. William A. Dayton, for a week." This is the stuff the cub railed against so loudly, but it keeps the customers reading the paper. It is the backbone of many a successful society page.

Inez has two ways of getting this information. She builds a list of women "in the know" to whom she telephones frequently. Like this:

"Good morning, Mrs. Windham. This is Inez Adams at the *Tribune*. Have you an item for me today?"

"Why, no, I don't think I have."

"Aren't you taking a week-end trip during this glorious fall weather? Or entertaining out-of-town guests? Oh, I thought surely *you'd* have an item for me."

"I'm *so* sorry. Now let me think—oh, yes, Mrs. Percival is entertaining someone—I can't remember her name, but it's Mrs. Percival's sister. Yes, the Mrs. Percival of Cornell Street."

Sometimes Mrs. Windham has all the information, instead of half of it, but in any event Inez calls Mrs. Percival, who is genuinely flattered that her modest entertaining has become suddenly so important. Two phone calls make one item; Inez is happy if she can keep the arithmetic in that ratio.

The whole secret is to have so many of these back-fence reporters that Inez doesn't have to call the same women too often. If she does, the "Social Briefs" column becomes limited to the affairs of the twenty-five or thirty women on Inez's list and their friends. If her list has 150 or 200 names, she need call Mrs.



Windham only once every two or three weeks, and thereby Inez gets far more names into the column. Names sell papers.

The second bit of machinery in rounding up the personals is to enlist the help of a dozen or so neighborhood gossips and make them ex-officio reporters. Often their only pay is a free copy of the paper; sometimes they get a low space rate. These neighborhood clearing houses delight in being connected, even remotely, with the paper and will go to no end of trouble to bring in half a column of personals. They would have been reporters if they hadn't gotten married. Naturally, Inez watches each recruit closely and scratches off anyone who proves inaccurate or otherwise unreliable.

A third device, bringing news often of more than personal-mention size, is to make treaties with people whose business brings them in contact with women planning social happenings. Mrs. Dwight had a permanent four weeks ago and this week she endures another. The beauty-parlor manager asks a few skillful questions and discovers that tomorrow she will entertain at a dinner party for twenty, at which her daughter's engagement will be announced. The manager passes the information on to Inez who at once calls Mrs. Dwight, who wonders for a week how that omniscient society editor found out. "Why, all I had to do was tell her 'Yes,' 'Yes,' 'Yes.' She seemed to know *all* about it." Florists, caterers, and ice-cream makers can tip Inez of forthcoming dinner parties. Musicians can tell her of entertainments. The reward for this service may be a gift subscription to the paper, occasionally a modest money payment when the information was extra good, or mention in the story. "Johnson will cater" takes almost no space but it makes Mr. Johnson eager to pass on the next bit of information he finds.

Some news brings itself into the office. Every day Inez receives a score or so of telephone calls and letters in which townspeople tell her that they are going on week-end trips, entertaining company, or having birthday parties for their children. Inez accepts these tidbits happily; the more people become so interested in her page that they provide news for it, the more confident she can be that she is doing a good job. Many of these informants are completely modest. Mrs. Oliver Homann wishes the paper to

announce that she will be in Chicago all next week so that two or three friends who have planned, or threatened, to call upon her very soon will do so at a time when she will be at home. A few, however, are publicity grabbers; they want their names in the paper seven days a week. Smirkingly Mrs. Emanon telephones and gushes, "I thought you might like to know that my husband and I are attending the Theater Guild performance tomorrow evening." Inez soon knows who these space-hogs are, and sees to it that these half-dozen persons aren't mentioned each day unless actually they do things worthy of that mention, as probably they don't.

#### OTHER DEVICES

If Inez is ambitious, she prepares a quantity of time copy, as usable Thursday as Monday, against the day when society seems asleep. This copy is of two kinds, local and wire. The future book gives Inez hints for local copy. An August entry announces the annual visit of the Magnolia Club to Mrs. Sheridan's gardens, and Inez turns ahead to about March 15 and writes in a note, "Find out what flowers Mrs. Sheridan is planting this season." When March comes, she telephones Mrs. Sheridan and has a story of quarter-column length that can run any time within the next two or three weeks. The wire copy she obtains through a pact with the telegraph editor. The press association supplies him with reams of time matter, and he gives Inez the "social guff" about fashion, holiday spots, and the like. All Inez has to do is slug it "Soc. Misc." meaning "Society Page Miscellany."

She is careful, however, to get proofs about once a fortnight, so that she can order killed any copy now out of date. If she neglects this, some fat Friday the paper rides at forty-eight rather than the usual forty-four pages and plug type hitherto not needed is rummaged from any and all sources and dumped into pages in the fervent hope that somehow they can be filled. Months ago Inez sent along a time story about lovely places for summer vacations. For weeks it has been overlooked, but now it is tossed into Inez's page, on November 22 when the front-page weather report says, "Snow and much colder; probable minimum temperature 5

below zero." This sad condition will not occur if Inez regularly inspects the plug type and removes the whiskery stories.

Out-of-town papers help Inez frequently. From the society page of the Capital City *Gazette* she learns that Mrs. Harold Holland of her city is spending two weeks as house guest of Mrs. Willard McFarland, wife of the state supreme court justice. Inez has another item.

The picture and cut files occupy some of what Inez terms sarcastically her spare time. Her theme song is "More pictures, and then more pictures." She wants a photograph or a cut of every woman in town who might by any chance be worth mentioning on the society page. Inez disapproves of running the same woman's picture twice within a week and is not going to be forced into doing it merely because she doesn't have photos of enough of the few people currently doing things. To help the make-up editor, she tries for three pictures or cuts of the more prominent women, one a full-face view, one facing right, and the third facing left. Then, regardless of what make-up problems the page offers, the editor will have a picture looking in the right direction.

Inez keeps the society department's engraving bill high by replacing cuts five or ten years old with more modern pictures. No woman relishes being shown with a coiffure or hat of a decade before. Such a picture can make that woman an enemy of the paper, and Inez wisely avoids such a mishap.

#### AVOIDING JEALOUSIES

With all these machineries at work, Inez finds that the society page isn't large enough. Either the club news or the personal mentions must be butchered. She decides to drop the less active or prominent clubs. No more neighborhood sewing circles. To sidestep jealousies, she must omit all the sewing circles; she fosters seething rebellion if she makes exceptions. The only departure from this rule will be for the very occasional meeting of an obscure club which somehow has captured a speaker or entertainer notably better than its average. Mr. Justice Tilton, of the state supreme court, in town to visit his brother, consents to

talk informally to the Clifford Park Crochet Club, of which his sister-in-law is president. This is so far from a routine meeting that Inez must use it. She is glad that Mr. Justice Tilton has only one sister-in-law.

As a further guard against jealousies that would arise if she ran stories about only the larger and better-known clubs, Inez prints each day a "club calendar" in which she lists the time, place, and topic of the meeting of each club too minor to have a separate story. Members of that minor club realize that it receives very modest publicity, but chagrin is tempered by the fact that the club calendar almost always has rather vigorous typographic display. The calendar is so handy a page-brightener that the make-up editor can be counted on to give it a display. Inez makes very, very sure that her calendar is complete. One omission means twenty-five clubwomen blazing angry.

#### PAGE APPEARANCE

Making the society page look pretty is the make-up editor's worry, but Inez is smart enough to make the job easy for him. On an afternoon paper, the society page is one of the first to be prepared, because the meeting stories it carries will not be ready until late in the day and hence must be deferred until tomorrow. On a morning paper, the page often is kept open until 11.30 or midnight for night meetings. The afternoon paper's make-up editor has to get out of the way as many early pages as possible, for the benefit of the mechanical departments, and he is most likely to do a little corner cutting. The morning paper's make-up editor is battling a first edition and page 1 occupies him much more than does the society page, which is assembled on the run. The page deserves better and more deliberate treatment, but newspaper necessities keep it from receiving its due.

Inez has six means of helping the make-up editor, a somewhat frantic fellow with a couple of tobacco pipes sticking out of a hip pocket. He is forever bounding from the composing room to shout to the city editor, "How long before we get that page 1 city-hall story?" and ducking back into the typesetters' den before the city editor can answer. Inez knows that he is perpetually five minutes on the wrong side of the clock and that her little coöpera-

tions will be appreciated warmly. Her ways of being helpful are:

1. To get her copy in early. When the day is young, the linotypers howl for work. Her copy available then, it is set gladly and easily. If it is tardy, it must compete with front-page and other "must" matter and Inez soon becomes known as "that crazy behind-time girl." Early copy means early type, which gives the make-up man a much better chance to arrange an effective page. He knows that all his metal is available and he can plan a structure without the fear that some late story will force him to rebuild the whole page.

2. To make the copy fit the space. Early in the day, the advertising department gives the news editor a schedule showing what ads are running, where, and their size. Inez looks at this "dummy" for her page, and accepts it as unalterable. The dummy shows eighty-eight inches available for news, and Inez doesn't try to smuggle an extra half-column on the page. She can't do it until the happy day when type is made of rubber rather than metal, and that time will be long in coming. Or it may be the opposite situation: 124 inches for news, on a day when Inez has little to write about. With a sigh she uses information so trifling that ordinarily she would discard it without a thought.

Some days, of course, she simply cannot keep her copy down to the intended space. The social whirl has been revolving too fast and she has seven columns of news but only four and a half of space. She tells the make-up editor promptly, so that he can re-schedule the paper and give her extra space on the page facing society. If she does not tell him until noon, she finds that the facing page already has been prepared and the best he can do is to put the "society flopover" six pages away. An early warning prevents this plight.

3. To give the make-up editor a list of her stories. As he directs the filling of the page, he checks each story off the list and thereby knows that none was missed. If a listed story has not appeared, he hunts for it, successfully. Without a list, he assumes that all the society type has come, sends the page, and fifteen minutes later is confronted with a ten-inch story with a top-of-column headline. He may call back the page and make it

over, but he is more likely to toss that late story into some other page and the account of the D. A. R. annual meeting appears beside the obituary column, three pages away from society.

4. To provide plenty of stories long enough to wear headlines. The blurry, all-grey society page is the one without enough headlines. For each column of space, Inez should have at least two stories carrying headlines, unless her chronicles are remarkably long. On a dull day, Inez takes two or three personal mentions that have a common denominator and hitches them together. Instead of three separate items about family dinner parties, she writes a lead about "Among the families entertaining at dinner tonight will be. . . ." Then follows the guest list for each party.

5. To adjust pictures to the space. Her page has its usual eighty inches, but the space is bunched because an advertisement four columns wide runs to the top of the page. If Inez schedules two 2-column pictures to run side by side, the make-up editor is licked. He cannot avoid having one picture touch the ad and the other go into an outside column. Either necessity is a tribulation to a conscientious make-up editor; to bump into two of them on the same page utterly ruins his day.

6. To provide a different picture arrangement each day instead of calling everlastingly for two 2-column pictures, side by side. Inez has enough handy variations to give the make-up editor an excellent variety. Among them are:

Three 2-column cuts under a six-column caption. This arrangement cannot be used if advertising carries high up on the page.

The conventional two 2-column pictures, under a four-column caption. Here the change from two 2-column captions to one half-page line provides the variety.

Three  $1\frac{1}{3}$  column pictures under a four-column caption. This is an extremely effective arrangement, because of the contrast in picture width and type width.

Two  $1\frac{1}{3}$  column pictures with stories beside them in  $1\frac{1}{3}$  column measure. This demands more time in typesetting, but makes a bright display. The  $1\frac{1}{3}$  column cut and the  $1\frac{1}{3}$  column story leave  $1\frac{1}{3}$  of a column of white space. Two such streaks of white emblazon the page. If Inez calls for the stories

in 2/3-column measure she loses the patches of white and the page is less impressive.

One 2-column picture about five or five and a half inches deep, flanked by one-columns three or three and a half deep. This is an excellent arrangement and one that the make-up editor can work with rapidly.

These are sample variations; Inez can think of several more. The idea is merely to give the page a variety of structures.

### PERILS IN CLUB NEWS

Inez must know her news field as well as the city and sports editors know theirs. She must know which individuals and organizations are truly important, or she will underplay good news. She avoids overemphasizing any one group to prevent making the other groups jealous. Sometimes a tiny club has the best publicity chairman in town and Inez has more copy about that organization than she can use.

She does not run advance stories and then forget to write that the event finally has taken place. If on Sunday she announces that the League of Women Voters will hear Professor Perkins on Thursday evening, and on Friday gives no mention of what he said, readers who remembered the Sunday story will be disappointed. Inez is lazy if her "Perkins spoke" story is parallel to the "Perkins will speak" in everything but tense. Changing "will talk" to "talked" isn't covering the story, but one or two sentences summarizing his remarks will make the Friday story substantial enough to be satisfying.

Because she is an alumna, Inez can easily believe that the College Club is more prominent than actually it is. In some cities the College Club is resented, because of overstrict eligibility rules or because few members of the community are college women. Too much stress upon clubs affiliated with any one religion, especially Inez's own, is always dangerous. If the Baptists, for example, think that the Unitarians are "favored," Inez will have trouble.

Which is better, club news or general society? "Club news," Inez answers without hesitation. Club news is easier to get, owing to the help of the publicity chairmen, but she may be very

wrong. Even a club-crazy town has many unaffiliated residents. A "good" wedding, involving fairly well-known names, is worth more prominence than any but the best of club meetings.

Club news has another danger, that of inaccuracies in names. Officials, including publicity chairmen, do not know members' names, but they won't admit their ignorance. Instead, they guess, and often guess wrong.

Mrs. Lila Hubbard, publicity chairman for the Garden Club, is writing about the election of officers. Mrs. Elinor Granger is the new president, but Mrs. Hubbard spells it "Eleanor." Inez soon learns that names must be checked in the city directory, the telephone book, or the club directory. Even the minor clubs issue an annual directory, though sometimes they call it a program. It is their once-a-year bit of ego. Inez collects and cherishes these directories; they spare her so many telephone calls beginning, "I want to know why you got my name wrong in your write-up yesterday."

Inez can foment social unrest by failing to standardize her name identifications. In the first paragraph of the Garden Club story she refers to "Mrs. William Lanston, well-known North Side dahlia enthusiast," and in the third paragraph she mentions "Miss Freda Young, 1220 Baltimore Street." Miss Young at once ceases to be a friend of the paper. To her, that story read "Mrs. Lanston, so very well known that we needn't bother to tell you where she lives," and "Miss Young, so inconspicuous that the only way you can remember her is by her street address."

#### THE DAILY GRIEF

Literary style on the society page is one thing to Inez and entirely another to the readers. To Inez it is the pinnacle of monotony, because she is saying the same things over, and over, and over again. She will scream if she must write again that "the annual meeting and election of officers of the — club will be held at —." Inez has to see and write every word; only a few repetitions are needed to surfeit her. Readers, however, can glance at a story and see as few words as they desire. They probably ignore some stories, thereby reducing further their con-



tact with the often-recurring phrases. In brief, Inez works with the news and readers play with it.

Inez, accordingly, is an enthusiastic bidder for new wordings. If she bids too eagerly she will pick up phrasings that wrench the language at its roots. "The annual meeting of the Crocus Club will be held tomorrow afternoon at the home of Mrs. Scott Gilmore" becomes "When the Crocus Clubbers congregate tomorrow afternoon with Mrs. Scott Gilmore, it will be for the cheery festivities of that once-a-year assemblage at which new officers are designated and the progress of the closing twelvemonth reviewed." To Inez it is a psychological "escape." What it is to readers perhaps had better not be told too bluntly.

Or, if she's another sort of girl, Inez gives up and adopts a style so full of bromides that she can write it automatically, while she thinks about what to do when vacation comes. She dabs the platitudes with "featured," "interesting," "enjoyable," and "charming." That gives her another problem. If one singer is the "featured entertainer," all soloists must be; if one bride is "gracious," all brides must be, else those denied the adjectives will complain of discrimination. Inez either adjectives everyone or no one; she cannot bedeck some and make the others go unadorned.

Many offices have rigid formulae for the writing of certain types of society news, wedding stories, for example. One paper may carry the biography of the couple at the very end, and another may lift it high into the story. Inez is well advised to examine the files and see from yesteryear's editions what preferences the paper may have. These formulae, or prejudices, may be deliberate or accidental. Some are genuine "rules," adopted because the newspaper through the years came to believe that its readers preferred certain methods, and therefore insisted that those methods were of "must" desirability. Other times they are mere habits that grew up because Inez's predecessor was a routine worker who preferred to standardize everything. The copy desk men can tell Inez which situation applies.

In any event, she proceeds slowly in changing the paper's methods. Because her position is so important, she is watched closely

and too abrupt a change in the paper's writing practices may expose her to the charge of vanity. "We've always written these stories one certain way, as far back as I can remember, and I've been here sixteen years, but that way isn't good enough for this new girl. No, sir; she wants a lot of fancy writing." This comment may be mulish and uncharitable, but it has put many a new society editor under a blight that required weeks or months to dissipate.

Inez pleases the patrons best when she writes in conventional style, with no attempt at fine and fancy diction. Fancy writing too easily becomes slushy. However, Inez should be actively aware of certain distinctions in words. She has been using "marriage" as a synonym for "wedding." One day a copy editor motions sternly to her.

"Didn't anybody ever tell you that a 'marriage' is a religious or civil ceremony and a 'wedding' is a social event? This Walters-Graham hitchup at high noon in the bride's papa's lovely garden is a 'wedding' and that's all it is."

Yes, Inez, the raspy-voiced fellow is right. He'll be right again when he remarks that weddings don't "occur." The word means "to happen unexpectedly" and society page weddings aren't that sort. Certainly the marriage "rites" has too funereal a tone, and to say that the Rev. Henry Turner "performed" the service is to impute gymnastic or acrobatic qualities to the clergyman. Inez sometimes refers to club members as "ladies" rather than "women." The English know what a "lady" is; Americans never have been able to pin down the word. Because it means such different things to different readers, the word is ruled out, except in such platitudinous expressions as "ladies and gentlemen." Some papers object even to this and insist upon "men and women." Inez may refer to any unmarried woman less than thirty-five years old as a "debutante," intending the unobtrusive compliment that she is highly eligible. What the word means depends on where it is used; the age limit on debutantes differs widely from one city to another.

Sometimes Inez goes astray because she is the only girl on the staff. She thinks the office rules are for men only. Learning the style sheet is too much a bother, and she thought the manag-

ing editor was merely practicing typewriting when he hammered out that notice about "all society copy must be in by 10 A.M."

"Inez darling," says a copy editor with suspicious gentleness, "we don't capitalize 'street.' Be a good girl and remember that for ten minutes, will you?"

"This stuff is for tomorrow, isn't it?" the news editor asks when Inez drifts over to the copy desk at 11:43 with a column and a half of "Society Briefs."

"Oh, no," she protests. "It's for today."

"Not so you'd notice it. Your page went away twenty minutes ago—and we had to fill it up with the butter and egg market quotations."

Men can be so brutally cruel, especially when they're in the right.

A married woman generally uses her husband's name in social life, and her own in business. When she is a hostess she is "Mrs. Andrew W. French" and when she is proprietor of an interior decorating studio she is "Mrs. Arlene A. French." A widow usually reverts to her own name, but Inez finds out for each case because some widows dislike the custom, owing to its perpetual reminder of their bereavement.

### WEDDING STORIES

Two kinds of society stories are written by rule of thumb: engagements and weddings. Newly out of college, where snubbing the conventions is insisted upon, Inez is tempted to write that "Miss Anita Denby, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles T. Denby, has announced her engagement to. . . ." It simply isn't done. No engagement is socially valid until announced by the parents or guardians of the bride-elect. Inez therefore writes, "Mr. and Mrs. Charles T. Denby announce the engagement of their daughter, Anita, to. . . ." The convention is changing, but very slowly, and until the transition is accepted almost universally Inez uses the conventional phrasing to avoid offending readers. Why should it make so much difference? Because many readers regard an engagement as so momentous that any suggestion of departure from the age-old tradition is sacrilegious.

The wedding story is equally sacrosanct. Inez wishes she

could "pep up these weddings a bit." She'd better not. Thousands will see it, but the wedding story is written for three readers: the bride, her mother, and her father. Inez does the story as if it were to be clipped and pasted in the back of the family Bible—for that is exactly what will happen to it.

The bridegroom has to be there, but the wedding story is about the bride. The groom is a stage property. The bride's name comes first, even when she is from out of town and the bridegroom is a local resident. How much biography to put into the story varies with the city. In some places the custom is to identify only by telling who are the parents of the bride and the groom:

Miss Sandra Edmunds, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W. W. Edmunds, 216 Taylor Street, was married to Andrew G. Canfield, son of Mr. and Mrs. Eric Canfield, 19 Weston Boulevard, last night at St. George's Church.

In other cities, the pedigree is used, thereby settling (or setting off) the inevitable argument whether the bride made "a good catch." Certainly it is interesting to learn that Miss Edmunds, who has been a Girl Scout director, a Y.W.C.A. secretary, and prominent in the Theater Guild, is now daughter-in-law of the president of the city's biggest bank and wife of the fullback of the last Atherton College football team to win the state championship. Some Southern papers carry the pedigree back for several generations, but other sections regard this as extreme.

The wedding-story lead tells the names of the bride and the groom, the time and place of the ceremony, and the name of the clergyman. The second paragraph lists the attendants and the third describes the gowns, especially that of the bride. Paragraph 4 tells of related events, such as the reception or wedding breakfast. Next come statements where the honeymoon will be spent, if this item is available, and when and where the couple will be "at home." The "at home" is important, because it can be terribly awkward for the couple, still undecided where to put the davenport and therefore leaving it temporarily in the middle of the living room, to have to pretend intense pleasure at receiving unexpected callers. The only kind thing is for the well-wishers

and the curious to stay away until the couple is ready to go on exhibit. Whether the biography comes at the end or immediately after paragraph 3, related events, is a matter of local preference.

Inez dreads making a mistake in a wedding story, and she knows that the excitement of final preparations is so disturbing that even the bride's mother will get things wrong—and then blame the paper for repeating them. Accordingly, Inez prepares a "wedding blank," listing all the information she will need, and sends it to the bride about a fortnight before the wedding. If then there is complaint about accuracy, Inez silences it by showing the filled-in blank.

Always Inez is alert for chances to run lists of names. Appointment of a book-selecting committee for the current literature section of the Woman's Club is no resounding news, but it gives the six members of that committee a chance to see their names in the paper and that means six friends for the society page. If space is tight, Inez clips the speech by Miss Holley of the Garfield High School faculty from two paragraphs to one, but she keeps in the list of names.

Way back when the cub reporter was condemning the society page as a waste of white paper and printer's ink he mentioned "all this about who was there and what she wore." Perhaps no masculine intelligence can see wherein this information is worth its cost, but Inez knows it is. "Who was there, what she wore, and a list of local names" is the recipe for a society page that builds hundreds of feminine friendships for the newspaper.

Getting that information demands that Inez be a crackerjack.

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## 26

### THEATER NEWS

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#### RAY SEES A SHOW

EDNA DOESN'T WANT A BY-LINE tomorrow and is on a search for someone who does. "Ray," she accosts a reporter not long enough on the staff to know the game, "Ray, you were going to the Arcanum tonight, weren't you?"

"I'd like to, but I'll have to wait until pay day."

"This is the first night of the new show. Wouldn't you like to go on my pass?"

Clever girl, Edna; those glamorous words, "on my pass," are irresistible. In the back of his mind Ray always has pictured reporters as flashing badges or passes and walking in nonchalantly while the general public lined up bovinely before the ticket window and waited for a chance to pay to get in.

"Sure, I'd like to go. Thanks, Edna."

"That's wonderful," Edna beams. "I simply can't go tonight and the Arcanum review has to be in the paper tomorrow."

Ray blinks. He will be of the "working press" rather than a leisurely visitor. Then he brightens again. "I've always wanted to try my hand at dramatic criticism."

Sorry, Ray, but you're tagged for movie reporting, entirely otherwise than dramatic criticism. Only the largest cities need a dramatic critic, except for rare or very rare occasions. He has been replaced by the theatrical reporter.

About twenty-five years ago many a city, even a small one, supported stage plays. Either the traveling shows visited it or a "stock company" stayed in town all season and offered a different play each week. The theater took itself solemnly; it

was "art" and its personnel were "artists." When a new play appeared, it was judged with much palaver about motivation, dramatic technique, and plot structure.

The movies were cheap little shows hardly worth discussing; they were *so* crude, and utterly without art. Yet the flickery projectors and the frequent film-breaks didn't kill the movies. More and more people saw them. There were two reasons. One was economic; to see a movie show cost only a dime—sometimes a nickel—but the stock company began its prices at a quarter. The other reason was psychological. The stage was too busy being artistic to find out whether it was satisfying the public. The movies, with all the imperfections of the early cameras, could not attempt the artistic; they had to be interesting because there was nothing else they could do.

Now and then a movie producer put on the silk hat and prepared an "artistic spectacle." The spectacle usually consisted of battle scenes in which 2,000 extras raised so much dust that it blinded the camera, and of two or three temple or palace shots showing enormous stretches of canvas painted so cleverly that it looked almost like marble.

Before anyone realized what had happened, the "legitimate" theater had disappeared from many cities. The road shows disbanded and the stock companies were bankrupt. The movies kept on being interesting, and technical improvements permitted them to capture a surprising amount of incidental artistry.

A new breed of audience developed. The theatergoer of yesteryear wished to be entertained, but he appreciated that he was of a minority block in the population and this knowledge went to his head. The city had 150,000 residents of whom 1,000 went to the theater regularly, and he was one of the 1,000. Then some unkempt neighbor surprised the whole block by going to the theater; afterward he told the constant patron, "Gee, that was a good show." Peaking an eyebrow, the confirmed theatergoer replied loftily, "Yes, quite possibly, but terribly crude. Hardly a line of nuance."

The people who went to the movies knew nothing of nuance. Sound films hadn't been devised, and the actors had to advance a situation with their cheek rather than their tongue muscles.

The actors overacted, to compensate for the deficit of speech, and the plots remained obvious rather than intricate. The movies were simple, vigorous, stereotyped. The villain was recognized at once because he wore a certain sort of mustache; it, rather than his words, told his dismal intentions.

### THE CONDITIONED AUDIENCE

Today the producers are much more accustomed to mixing art and entertainment, but ordinarily they subordinate the art. The audiences have had two or three decades of thinking of the films in terms of entertainment; they have been conditioned to do so. They do not care that a picture is artistically impossible because the plot relies too much upon *deus ex machina*. If it is a lively, interesting show, they're satisfied.

It is for these folk that Ray will write about the new bill at the Arcanum. They are not concerned whether the picture is dramatically pure or mongrel. Ray, accordingly, will replace his tuxedo by a soft-collar shirt. His work is not to expatiate about "dramatic values" but to describe the show.

He writes for two reader groups: those who have seen the performance and wish to "live it over again" and those who wonder whether to go tonight or whether this is the week to skip. Writing for these groups is reporting, not criticizing.

"Yes," Ray interjects, "but you can't tell them whether it's a good show without criticizing and passing judgments." True, partly, but the percentages will run about ninety for reporting and ten for criticizing. In a handful of cities, notably New York, dramatic criticism persists in its ancient and altitudinous form. This is lamentable, because too often the Ray in Junctionville or Canawba Falls sees the New York papers and believes that what is done in the big town should be imitated everywhere. He forgets that the New York critic writes for an audience not found elsewhere, an audience composed of the last survivors of the theatergoing segment of 1905 or 1910. That specialized audience may thirst for dramatic criticism, but Ray's audience prefers reporting with only a little criticism.

How, now, shall Ray proceed with his movie reporting? He will see the show twice. The first time he watches and enjoys the



pictures; the second time he watches professionally to get material for his story. He takes notes, quite as if he were reporting a speech. Yes, it can be done, for a movie house is only half-dark.

As he watches, he analyzes. One scene stirs hearty laughter. "Why did they laugh?" Ray asks, and in his story he explains why. Readers then tell themselves, "I knew that was one of the best scenes in the picture, but I didn't know why it was until I read the paper." Ray makes himself an expert observer.

He does not review the plot. To do so spoils the pleasure of the reader who will see the show tomorrow, and wearies the reader who already has seen the picture.

#### FOUR REPORTING DEVICES

Ray is alert for chances to use four procedures:

1. Pointing out what others in the audience missed. The cash customers thought it a gripping, emotional picture, but Ray judged it closely and found that the restrained background music quite as much as the heroine's vicissitudes did the tear-jerking. Or perhaps the historical accuracy was notably high or low. The film showed a newspaper dated 1724. Ray points out that it employed Cheltenham type, which hadn't been created that early.

2. Picking out a central theme or impression and linking the entire story to that theme. Sometimes it cannot be done, but whenever it can it is effective. This unifying element may be nothing more than the vigorous epithet of a character actor, repeated every time the situation becomes tense; it may be adroit flashbacks to the old family farm, or it may be in the music. If it's there, Ray tells about it.

3. Giving specific examples. "The photography was uniformly excellent" means little. Tell instead of one or two scenes in which the cameramen excelled and how they did so. The lensmen did so splendidly that the film shows the bubbles as the hero exhales under water, for all that the water is still roiling from the propeller of the boat from which the villain pitched the hero. Cite that instance.

4. Comparing with other pictures. This week's murder-mystery film does exactly what last year's big-thriller did, but

does it better, or worse. Make the comparison or contrast. Petite Doris Dawn is more (or less) charming than in her last picture. Tell about it.

Even the occasional picture that sets out to be art gives Ray a slim chance to substitute criticism for reporting. Readers may be mildly interested in the observance of the Aristotelian unities, but they remain more concerned whether it was "a good show" than whether the Greek chorus really can be modernized. Once in two or three years the town gets a road show. Back on Broadway, where the audience is specialized, criticism in large chunks might be in order, but not for Ray's readers. They wish to know whether it is a good show.

Theater Guilds and Little Theaters are restoring the stage play in many cities. The Guild is sincerely interested in "good drama," that is, art, but it is hard-headed and insists that art be synonymous with entertainment. The Guildsters and their audiences are not "professional" theater folk; they are part-timers and they will read Ray's stories with more eagerness if those stories put reporting far ahead of criticism.

#### TOLERANCE, PLEASE

The home-talent performance, whether it be by the Little Theater, the Buskin Club of South Memorial Church, or the Thespian Society of Garfield High School, puts a heavy burden on Ray. Everyone connected with the production is a part-time theaterman. If the show is fairly good, it is excellent. The novices and the amateurs cannot be held to the standards imposed upon professionals. The Buskin Clubbers try that lusty melodrama, *The Ghost Breaker*, and one of the villains, encased in medieval armor, can't make the stuff work. For half a minute he clanks and rattles as he tries to get in motion and sneak up noiselessly behind the unsuspecting hero, who now attempts desperately to avoid hearing the racket behind him and to be surprised when what he thought was a suit of empty armor turns out to contain an enemy.

"Awful," Ray fumes. "Terrible. I'll take this show for a ride." Ray uncorks the strongest vitriol, ridicule. His story turns every Buskin member into a hearty enemy of the news-

paper. Surely, something went wrong, but Ray overemphasized that something. He was so anxious to do some panning that he missed entirely the hero's good ad-libbing in which he tried to cover up the moment of everything-gone-askew.

This does not mean that the faltering performance is to be emblazoned as a tremendous triumph. It does mean that Ray should make allowances. When he must criticize, let him be: (1) kindly and tolerant; (2) specific.

Harry Anderson was a total loss as a down-East Yankee. He tried to talk through his nose and all he did was sneeze. He was so hopeless that the rest of the cast had to keep turning away from the audience while it snickered at Anderson's pitiful efforts.

Was Anderson truly so "hopeless"? A genuine down-Easter can pull four syllables out of "cow" or "town." No one else can extract more than three. Let Ray try it a few times and he'll appreciate Anderson's predicament. Also he will see why "total loss," "hopeless," and "pitiful" are too strong. If intolerance is to be the watchword, some one might suggest that Ray is a "total loss" because of the floating pronoun, "it," in his third sentence. "Oh, but that's different." Yes?

Ida Elwell was her usual vivacious self. She turned in a good performance that sparkled. The rest of the cast was good, but Miss Elwell was superb.

Probably she was, but this isn't the way to say so. Make it specific and tell how she was superb:

Ida Elwell was her usual vivacious self. Her enthusiasm in the spelling-bee scene and her delight at winning third prize were the liveliest bits in the show.

Readers who have seen the performance will say, "Come to think of it, that spelling bee was the best thing she did." Those yet to see the production have something to watch for.

The movies have recognized that the "behind the scenes" workers are important and announce with the cast the names of cameramen, wardrobe custodians, and chief carpenters. In home-grown shows these names are even more valuable. The climax scene is in the smoking room of a ferryboat and the car-

penters and painters have worked so well that the audience can even smell the Hudson River. The names of these backstageers belong in the story.

Story structure is simple:

Block 1: The five *W*'s.

Block 2: Names of chief characters and their roles. No comment unless it be specific.

Block 3: Names of secondary characters and roles. Again, no comment unless it is specific.

Block 4: Explicit description of the show, tied if possible to a central theme or impression.

Block 5: Names of the backstage crews.

Block 6: Names of chorus or battle-scene members.

Block 7: Names of musicians.

Block 8: Names of director, coach, publicity chairman.

Should an ordinarily minor group, such as the battle-scene soldiers, have unexpected interest, its block should be lifted higher in the story. A sample story follows:

*(Block 1: The five W's)*

An audience of 600 persons saw the Thespian Club of Garfield High School present the comedy, *Roll Along*, last night at the school auditorium. The play, the club's second production this season, gave five actors prominent roles, two of them calling for difficult character portrayals. The play will be repeated tonight at 8.

*(Block 2: Names of chief characters and their roles)*

Mabel Davis, a senior, and Harold Denny, a junior, had the leading parts. Miss Davis, appearing for the first time as a leading lady, was Myrtle, the country girl who thought every man with a moustache must be a foreign spy. Her best work was done in the second act, when she condemned the leading man as being a European under-cover agent. Denny pleased the audience most when, in the last act, he persuaded Detective Moriarty to lend him \$100 with which to get married.

Arlene Hollister, a junior, taking part in her first play, was a convincingly prim spinster. Her appearance at the police station in the third act was her most effective bit.

The two character actors, John Gunderson, a sophomore, cast as Detective Moriarty, and George Drew, a senior, appearing as the absent-minded Professor Smith, resisted the temptation to

burlesque their parts and were as real as their lines permitted. Smith's arrest by Moriarty, which so upset the professor that he stuttered in German, was among the most laughable moments in the play.

*(Block 3: Names of secondary characters and roles)*

The other parts were taken by Mildred Freer, a senior, as the leading man's nervous and suspicious aunt; Helen Somers, a sophomore, as Ethel, a servant with ambitions to become a detective; Roland Green, a junior, as a slow-motioned policeman; Harry Watts, a sophomore, as a life-insurance salesman, and Michael Flynn, a junior, as the mysterious man from Europe.

*(Block 4: Explicit description of the show, tied to a central theme or impression)*

The play centered about the fears of several characters that a newcomer to the community was a foreign spy trying to steal the formula for an explosive invented by Professor Smith. Most of the incidents arose from the fact that one character or another overheard just enough fragments of a conversation to misunderstand its meaning. Though this one device was used throughout the play, it did not become tiresome, largely because the actors made their roles realistic enough to avoid burlesquing their parts.

The last act had four of these misunderstood episodes, but the cast ran them off so rapidly that they seemed entirely natural.

*(Block 5: Names of the backstage crews)*

The scenery was built and painted by a crew directed by John Francis, a junior. Other members were. . . .

Electrical work was directed by Harvey Osgood, a senior, assisted by John Kline, a sophomore, and Andrew Dahlgren, a freshman. Edna Ryan, a junior, and Marjorie Brown, a senior, were in charge of properties. The stage hands were. . . .

*(Block 6: Names of chorus or battle scene members)*

The "angry citizens" who swarmed to the police station in the last act were Mildred Manning, a freshman; Georgia Dyne, a freshman; Louise Crump, a sophomore; . . .

*(Block 7: Names of musicians)*

An eight-piece section of the school orchestra played between the acts. The music was directed by James Burke, a senior, and the players were. . . .

*(Block 8: Names of director, coach, publicity chairman)*

Miss Edith Wells, teacher of English, was general director of the play and Harper Foss, teacher of history, was the coach. George Rodney, a junior, was in charge of publicity; Edna Thornton, a sophomore, ran the box office, and the ushers were John Prince, a freshman; Harry Altman, a sophomore. . . .

Note the number of names carried in this story. Usually they can be lifted from the program, but sometimes the program will be incomplete and will omit, for example, the names of the stagehands. Getting those names is worth the effort. Note also that there is no vague or general comment; every judgment is explicit. There is no scintillating writing; readers are more interested in the play than in what the reporter can do with or to the English language.

Ray never pans a performance. To do so is to pan those who enjoyed it, by saying in effect, "If you liked that show, you were a chump." Where unfavorable criticism is imperative, he allocates it carefully. It is unfair to berate Leading Man Harry Winsted for stilted, artificial speeches; the playwright rather than the actor should have the blame.

The professional show, film or stage, should be judged by more rigid criteria than those focused upon the home-grown performance. Ray may hesitate to brand a movie as poor entertainment, for fear the paper may lose the movie house ad. The film theater is the only sacred cow extant; it is high time that the beast be slaughtered, as in many offices it has been. Often Ray feels obligated because the theater manager gives him a pass. It is healthier for Ray to pay his way in, and some offices are giving the movie reporter the forty cents needed for a ticket.

### THE THEATER COLUMN

Why does Edna rate a by-line? She has made the movie column a strong item. Every office receives a ton a day of Hollywood publicity, extravagantly written. Some movie reporters clip a few fistfuls of this blah and use it for weekly theater columns to supplement the reports run whenever the houses change their bills. Such a column appears Friday or Sunday and is supposed to be absorbing to readers unusually addicted to movie going. Edna, however, was wise enough not to turn her column into a paste-up of Hollywood publicity. She uses it for source material, and nothing more. Edgar Eversharp of Gargantuan Studios is the city's choice for the ideal hero, so Edna watches Gargantuan publicity. When it offers a good yarn about Edgar, she rewrites it, dropping the nine-and-ninety lauda-

tory adjectives. Thus she converts it from puffery into human interest or feature matter.

She brings as much as she can of local material into her column. The theater managers, the projection staff, the ushers, all become story material. Manager Joe Kenney of the Riviera tells how this city's taste in pictures differs from that of other towns in which he has worked. Here he dares book a film "with a lot of history in it," but at Green River Falls he had to avoid such pictures or run them at a loss. Done rightly, these stories are legitimate; botched, they are free advertising.

If the city has a Theater Guild, Edna has inexhaustible material. She can write three or four columns on the work of the committee that decides which plays to present.

If residents in any number go to New York, Chicago, or other theater towns, she brings in material about the stage plays at the metropolis, as an assistance to readers who next week or the week after will be visiting the Broadway or the Loop theaters.

Edna has nearly if not actually the power to make or break a theater. The Guild plans a season of six plays. Edna doesn't like the first two. One was a farce and she believes that comedy must be so restrained that it can't be spotted at the first attempt. The other was a mystery and Edna hates detectives. If Edna writes viciously of the "infantile selection of plays," she can kill the Guild's efforts so thoroughly that the later productions will have fewer persons in the audience than on the stage. One Eastern city lost its stock company because the local Edna wrote so strongly that the plays were shoddy. Perhaps the plays weren't top notch, but the audiences enjoyed them until Edna convinced the public that it was being swindled. Although the company included several actors who had appeared season after season in that city and were applauded vociferously no matter what roles they had, Edna murdered the stock company in less than a month. When the theater was dark, Edna bragged of her power. And now the Sunday theater page is half its former size.

#### GRACE NOTES

Seth Grantham is one of the few staff members with a double title. When he is the courts reporter, he is the Prince; when he

is the music reporter, he is Sousa. Like so many music reporters, he is a part-time specialist, for only in the metropolis is the musical news heavy enough to demand full-time reporting, let alone full-time criticizing.

Music is one of the paper's specialties, not because the publisher ordered its elevation, but because Sousa nurtured it. When he joined the staff the paper averaged four music offerings a year, three of them wire stories from out of town. Sousa asked if he could do the paper's "musical criticism."

"We haven't any," the city editor retorted. "This town's nearest approach to music is a couple of night-club bands."

Sousa believed him and spent six months lamenting that Providence had not dropped him in a town crammed with orchestras and contraltos. Then he saw a one-sentence item in the "City Briefs" about a recital to be given by the advanced piano pupils of Miss Wickham. Sousa had nothing to do that evening, and so he attended. He wrote a quarter-column review. The city editor was surprised, but he used the story. Two days later another music teacher telephoned to ask that a reporter attend the recital to be given by her pupils. "She'll be mad for a year if you don't go," the editor told Sousa.

Then a doting parent bought twenty-five copies of the issue reviewing the recital. The city editor said nothing at the time, but a few days later he suggested, "We might give the Garfield High School orchestra a feature story. Drop around some day soon and see what they've got."

From this start Sousa built a run that furnishes him a Sunday column and several stories each week. He discovered, the city editor discovered, and readers discovered that the community had a latent but genuine interest in music. The public read the music stories and enjoyed them. Sousa now is a specialist reporter, valued because he can do well with a news field that no one else can handle at all. He has a sizable list of sources for his stories:

1. The music teachers. Recitals given by their pupils are usable, and the teachers are good for interviews. When the radio put on a special Stephen Foster program, Sousa made a "local angle" by running a symposium explaining why Foster's songs are so cherished.



2. The music students. Though none may attain distinction, some become undeniably interesting. LeRoy Downie began with piano, picked up violin, and then added the French horn. "That's a combination for you," Sousa reflected. "I'll have to ask him 'Why?' "

3. The school and lodge orchestras and bands. The kindergarten class at St. Francis parochial school institutes a "rhythm band." Sousa fears the worst but he interviews the sister who teaches the kindergarten and writes a column-long story showing that five-year-olds aren't too young for music if the music is brought within their capacities. The Lincoln High School band yields a dozen stories a year. How the director chooses a drum major is interesting, and so is his explanation why he includes sonatas as well as marches in the band's repertoire. The American Legion drum corps is the source of many a story. Why the corps took second award at the state convention competition makes a half-column chronicle.

4. Church music. Sousa knows that some Methodists attend the Congregational church because they so much enjoy its music. He finds out the choir director's formula. December brings a story on "the most popular Christmas music," and Easter demands a story for each church telling what its special music will be.

5. Concerts and recitals by other than pupils. Inevitably, the Women's Club schedules "Music Day" and engages an out-of-town singer. Myra Morrison hopes some day to be renowned, though as yet she is scarcely known on the concert stage. She travels by day coach rather than parlor car, but her concert for the Women's Club is heard by 275 listeners and makes a story.

6. Contests. The Lincoln band goes to the state university for the annual competition for Class B schools, and Sousa goes along.

7. Local music clubs and organizations. The Beethoven Club is a gossip society, yet it manages to arrange six or seven programs a year at which its members give mildly good recitals. Mrs. Helen Sims offers harp solos; no one knew the city had a harpist until Sousa stumbled upon the information. The existence of the Plumtree Road symphony orchestra was a complete

secret until Sousa found out that it gives two or three concerts a year at the Plumtree Community House, and then plays for dancing.

"But this isn't *Music*." It isn't silk-hat music and little of it is erudite. It is, however, a community interest, the more desirable because it must supply its own motive-power. Sousa found out from the telephone exchange how much interest music commands: Sunday, during the Ford music hour, telephone calls drop about twenty per cent because so many subscribers are listening to the concert brought by the radio.

If Sousa defined music as an enterprise for only the initiated, he would have little to write about. The moment he saw it as indigenous and natural, he had an unending procession of stories.

Most of them call for more reporting than criticism. Criticism is an evaluation of the technical accomplishments of the performer and of his interpretation of the musical score. It is likely to be so specialized that only a reader with considerable musical education can comprehend. Reporting is a description of what happened, with little technical explanation.

The high-school band gives its annual public concert, before an audience of proud but fidgety papas and mamas. Sousa analyzes the program to show which selections put the greatest burden upon the players. He tells which numbers the audience appreciated most. He tells how much of the program was "classical" and how much was "popular." When he comes to the judgments, he follows the policy of Edna and Ray in the theater column: every comment is explicit. "National Emblem" is a grand and noisy march, but the trumpets can ruin it if they become too shrill. Sousa doesn't say that this old favorite was the most poorly performed number; he tells exactly why it was botched. And he tells it in kindly fashion, never in sarcasm.

He is especially careful when commenting upon the performances of youngsters. They cannot stand the emotional damage done by an unfavorable review, particularly if it is spotted with sarcasm. Surely, Violet Marsh had a moment of stage fright and soured several chords, but instead of belittling her for losing her self-possession, Sousa either overlooks that bad moment or compliments her upon regaining her control.

Because the city contains only a few readers who know music

technically and appreciate its vocabulary, Sousa inclines to the two-track story with something in it for the much larger group of untrained readers and something also for the tiny band of the informed. The structure is:

Block 1: The five *W*'s.

Block 2: A nontechnical paragraph describing the concert or recital in "ordinary language," by such procedures as telling which selections received greatest applause.

Block 3: A technical section, characterizing the performance in musicians' language.

Block 4: An analysis of the program in ordinary language, showing, for instance, how much "conservative" and how much "modernistic" music was heard.

Block 5: Analysis of the program in technical language, for musician readers.

Blocks 2, 3, 4, and 5 may be shifted in sequence if circumstances indicate that the small "educated" audience should be favored over the larger "uneducated" group. At the start, Sousa feared that too simple a story would lose him the city's score of musically educated readers. He worried aloud. "Forget it," the city editor soothed. "They have music magazines, written just for them. You can't expect they'll like anything you write unless it's as deep as Lake Michigan. I'd rather have them call it dishwater than have the rest of our readers avoid the story because they thought they couldn't understand it." When and if he goes to *The New York Times*, Sousa can write for the erudite; while he is on the *Middleton Tribune* or the *Junctionville Gazette*, he writes for folk who think a fugue has something to do with a fugitive but haven't missed a Magic Key Sunday concert since the series began.

Americans are weak on "formal music" but enthusiastic about "music for fun." Sousa was wise enough to realize that, and thereby he gave thousands of readers another reason for saying that they "like the *Tribune* because it isn't all war and murder."

### Books

Jean had ambitions; no routine newspaper job for her, reporting P.T.A. and sewing circle programs. She would go with a book house and help select the manuscripts which, aided by her editing,

would become both best sellers and Pulitzer prize winners. After she had helped bring fortune and fame to other authors, she would do a few novels herself and become both a Literary Landmark and a Financial Furore.

The book houses, however, already had manuscript readers, more than enough of them. Jean was sensible; when the bottom of the pocketbook came into sight she looked for a newspaper job. She clung to her interest in books and asked the editor in chief why the paper had no book-review column. He looked down his spectacles and said, "No one ever has suggested it."

"I'm suggesting it now," Jean replied.

"Try it, my dear," the editor smiled. "If it pays out, I'll steal it as an editorial-page feature."

Jean spent about four dollars of her own money on postage asking publishers to send her review copies of new books. Many of her letters went unanswered; others brought replies that her city was not on the literary highways and it would be a waste of money to send her review copies. A few publishers thought she was asking for a job and replied that her application had been "placed on file." Here and there a publisher thought it might be an interesting experiment to have a book reviewed by other than the New York papers, Boston *Transcript*, or Springfield *Republican*. These reckless fellows were dismayingly few.

Their fewness is a main reason why many newspapers don't bother with book-review departments. How can a paper run a department when it can't get books to review?

Jean found that she could get one of every forty significant or interesting volumes. The other thirty-nine were unobtainable. That would make her review column spotty and random; it couldn't be a concentrated account of the world of contemporary books. She angled for a treaty with the public library, whereby she would review the books it bought. The library was willing, but it made its purchases only after *The New York Times*, the Springfield *Republican's* weekly issue, and the Boston *Transcript* had agreed that a volume was excellent. A book was elderly before the library acquired it. Worse, the library could afford only one of a dozen books it desired. Jean could have her treaty, but it wouldn't help her a great deal.

A persistent girl, she abandoned the idea of a quarter-page department that would be a "tiny *Times*" and went ahead with the handful of volumes the few reckless publishers sent her. Since she couldn't résumé the publishing field, she presented a book in isolation rather than as an item in competition with the hundreds of other new books. An intelligent girl, she realized that *The New York Times Book Review* appealed to a different group than did her one-column offering.

The *Times* section goes to book-reading specialists, as expert in their readings as a mechanical engineer is expert in stress-and-strain formulae. The so-called general or casual reader doesn't follow the *Time's* book reviews; he isn't expected to. When someone writes an historical novel of the Civil War, the *Times* reviewer compares or contrasts it with a dozen other novels dealing with that era. The professors of English and the other Ph.D.'s understand; the review is in their jargon, it is aimed at them.

Jean did a little sleuthing and estimated that her city contained less than fifty Ph.D.'s. A book review column for the *cognoscenti* would have few readers; the erudite wouldn't cancel their subscriptions to the *Times*, and the plebeians wouldn't cheer for a *Times*-like column. Most wisely, Jean decided to write for the plebeians rather than the *cognoscenti*.

That meant that she told whether a new book was good reading, rather than whether it would Win a Place in the World of Letters. Smart, smart girl. Plenty of plebeians read books, as the popularity of the rental libraries attests.

When she has a book calling for specialized knowledge on the part of the reviewer, Jean farms it out to someone with particular qualifications. Here is a volume about the Indians of Ecuador. Jean wouldn't know a Jivaro from a jitterbug, but Harry Weaver, now assistant superintendent at the Allen-Gordon factory, spent four years in western South America. She gives him the book in return for writing the review. Slowly she builds a corps of "consultants." In this fashion she has expert reviewers for volumes she cannot safely estimate herself.

In writing her reviews, Jean ignores the ebullient blurbs on the jackets of the books. Those blurbs are written with the hope

that the reviewer will be too lazy to read the volume and will plagiarize from the blurb, thereby describing the volume with indefensible enthusiasm. What the blurb says is less reliable than yesterday's weather forecast. Jean does not read every sentence of every book. Some volumes she reads closely; others she skims, with painstaking attention to various typical passages.

She writes in easy, natural English with an easy, natural vocabulary. Recent research has shown that book reviewers for some metropolitan tabloids and semitabs choke their reviews with words that dismay even the Ph.D.'s. Book reviews for the average reader can't do that; they must be in average language. Jean doesn't "write down" but she keeps her sentences lucid and clear rather than frescoed with jawbreaking words.

Each book is judged for its ability to interest the ordinary reader. Students and scholars read primarily for instruction; others read entirely or mainly for pleasure. These other persons are not interested vehemently in the meticulousness with which the latest biographer of Jefferson Davis sluiced new research into his characterization of the unfortunate Southerner. If Jean is able to write confidently that "Dr. Swatchit jumps too quickly at conclusions," she does so, but she emphasizes always that "This book is good (fair) (poor) reading."

The head of the high-school English department complains that the paper's book reviews aren't "scholarly." Neither are their readers.

Until the book-review department has persisted long enough to convince Missouri-mule publishers that "hinterland" residents can read, the reviewer will receive only a handful of volumes. A weekly or twice-weekly column is about the limit. This specialty offers little chance of becoming more than a part-time activity, yet it is worth the effort. It has made Jean a minor specialist and has given an appreciable number of readers another cause for satisfaction with the paper.

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## 27

### OBITUARIES

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#### WHO GETS THE JOB?

THE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM DIRECTOR has called in the assistant professor who handles the "other section" of the reporting class.

"Which senior shall we send to Centerville?" the director asks. "There's a job there."

"Umph," the assistant professor hesitates while he recalls what the present seniors did two years ago in sophomore reporting. "How about Jim Daniels? He's a good writer."

"Yes, but," the director objects. "This is Cartwright's paper, and he asks for someone who can do obits. They're what his paper is known for."

"Wait a moment, please." The assistant professor pulls out the classbook of two years before. "Here we are. When we came to the obits work, the best Daniels got was a C."

The director frowns. "Then he's not the man for Centerville. He'd spoil an obit, and Cartwright wouldn't come here for any more of his help. Who else?"

"Would Cartwright take a girl?"

"He might; he's hired girls before."

"There's Susan Smith. She was as precise and careful as anyone in the class."

Two days after commencement, Susan Smith begins work on the *Centerville Courier*.

What is there about obituaries that can make a paper handling them excellently so known or even famous in its territory that the publisher, wanting a new reporter, asks for one who can "do

obits?" The obituary makes enemies or friends for the paper almost more than does any other news category. Sooner or later each family has a member listed in the obituary column. If that mention is accurate and in good taste, the family and friends never will forget it. Nothing that can be said to the paper's detriment will stick; they judge the paper by the fact that, during their own time of sorrow, it was so careful and so scrupulous that it got even the smallest details right. If that mention is garbled and offensive, the family and friends never will forget it. Nothing that can be said to the paper's prestige will stick; they judge the paper by the fact that, during their time of sorrow, it was so negligent and nonchalant that it described father as a former master of the Masonic lodge, to which he didn't belong, whereas he should have been referred to as a one-time noble grand of the Odd Fellows. A trivial mistake? Not in an obituary, a story that will be read a dozen times, clipped, and pasted in the back of the family Bible.

In the smaller offices, the newcomer will be tried soon at "obits," including those of extremely prominent residents. In the larger office, the newcomer will be tried soon at obits, but those of less consequential persons. In either office, though especially in the smaller, high-quality reporting of obituaries has a good market price.

### THE DANGERS

Handling obituaries is full of dangers; slipping is easier than with many other forms of news.

The first peril is that of the "advance obit." Someone of prominence is seriously sick, and the reporter has the obituary set into type in case the personage dies five minutes before edition time. If that obit goes into the paper a day too soon, someone is out a job. Everyone connected with the story will be zealous in showing that the mistake wasn't his. The reporter can make certain to be in the clear. When she writes the advance story, Susan Smith puts at its top in three-inch letters "Proof to Smith. Hold for Release." As soon as the story is set into type, she gets a proof to see that the warning is there. If it isn't, she cajoles, wheedles, or berates the composing-room foreman until



the "hold" line is put atop the type. Then she gets a new proof, showing the warning line, and saves it carefully. If there is a mix-up, that proof is her evidence that the story was properly labeled as "not usable yet." There can be no arguing over a proof with a thirty-point "Hold for Release" at the top.

Obit pictures are another worry. Pictures of many citizens are already in the newspaper's library, but the assortment is never complete, and some of the pictures may be so old that newer photographs are called for. Susan goes to the house to get a photograph. Amazingly many families have but one picture, or one good picture, of their members. Susan gets it, and then the worry starts.

First, the picture and its frame must be kept clean. The engraving process is done by men with necessarily dirty hands, and it is easy to thumb-smudge or otherwise soil a picture or its frame. To prevent this, Susan marks lightly but largely on the back of the picture, "Obit—handle carefully, please don't soil." Then, about the time the engraver should deliver the cut to the composing room, Susan invades the typesetting establishment to see that the photograph isn't manhandled there. The engraver sends the photo, the cut, and a proof of the cut. Susan retrieves the photo before any inky-fingered apprentice paws it over. The proof, with the name of the person written upon it, will be enough for the make-up editor to identify the cut.

When the press rolls, Susan hurriedly inspects the paper to make certain that no obit pictures have been transposed. To get a picture of the wrong person in the obituary column is an enormous blunder. If this happens, Susan tells the city or news editor at once, so that the press can be stopped until the pictures are corrected.

The last worry is in returning the picture to the family. Every office has a system, or purported system, for returning photos. No great harm is done if an ordinary picture is held for a week or ten days, but an obit picture is different. The family wishes it returned speedily, for it will be looked at many, many times in the days immediately after the funeral. If there is the slightest doubt about the efficiency of the system, Susan herself mails or returns the photo.

Taking back a soiled or torn photo can do genuine damage to the paper's reputation. The aggrieved family tells the entire neighborhood what happened, and it may be weeks before anyone else in the district will let the paper borrow any sort of photo.

### BUILDING THE OBIT COLUMN

Consider now Rodney Harris, who went to the Junctionville paper. The obits have been neglected for one reason or another, and the city editor is anxious to remedy the fault. He tells Rod, "You're doing obits from now on. Build up the coverage." Spurring, ambitious words these, but they dismay Rod, for he doesn't know how to "build up the coverage."

His first tactics will be to insure that the undertakers report deaths promptly. The undertakers are the only dependable source of immediate information, because doctors may not inform the city clerk for two or three days and hence are worthless from a newspaper's viewpoint. In many cities the undertakers are trained to call the paper whenever they have "a case." In return, the paper puts into the obituary such a statement as, "The Kingsley Company is in charge of funeral arrangements." Generally the paper furnishes the undertakers with biographical blanks on which to record all information they can obtain about the deceased.

Sometimes this coöperation with the undertakers is so well established that the obit reporter does not bother with periodic telephoning to the morticians. Whatever the circumstances, however, he learns the voice of each and every person at each and every funeral parlor, so that he can spot any attempt at fakery. Certain deranged individuals think it humorous to call the paper and give a false announcement of a death. To their twisted minds it may be funny, but to the newspaper and to the person wrongly described as dead it is serious beyond mere "inconvenience." Under no circumstances does the obit reporter let an unverified death get into the paper. If he has the slightest hesitation about a supposed call from an undertaker, he finds out whether that call was genuine. He telephones the undertaker and asks, "That Winslow funeral you called me about a few

minutes ago—is it Thursday at 2:00 or 2:30?” If there was any fakery, the undertaker will say so, vigorously.

Poor Rod Harris, meanwhile, has gone to the newspaper's reference library, “the morgue,” to see what the situation is there. He has a list of twenty-five or so prominent residents and searches to see if a biographic sketch is available for each. He finds no sketch for fourteen of the twenty-five, and the material for six others hasn't been revised for more than ten years. Rodney knows now what the city editor meant when he said, “Build up the coverage.” Deaths occur at hours most awkward for the newspaper; there aren't minutes enough before edition time to find out about the person. If the career already is recorded in the files, Rod isn't cramped by the fact that he has only twenty-six minutes in which to prepare his story.

#### WHOSE NAMES GO IN THE MORGUE?

Which residents should be listed in the morgue? There are nine groups:

(1) All present and past members of the city government, as well as all permanent city officials, such as the fire chief and deputy city treasurer.

(2) All fairly prominent private citizens, regardless whether their prominence is current or in the past.

(3) All professional persons, such as doctors, lawyers, ministers, educators, and architects. The classified directory in the back of the telephone books helps enormously in building this list.

(4) All fairly prominent business, commercial, and industrial men and women. The business-beat reporter can tell Rodney who they are.

(5) Prominent politicians and labor leaders, past and present.

(6) Those active in lodges, charities, churches, and civic work.

(7) Those in hazardous callings, such as steeplejacks.

(8) Prominent members of racial groups. Surprisingly often this group is neglected, until André Pinaud, “papa” of the city's French colony, dies a few minutes before press time and the

paper has to record the fact with a headline deeper than the story under it.

(9) Persons interesting though not important. For example, one paper gave almost two columns to a man reduced by economic misfortune to being the attendant for a department store's parking lot. During the First World War this man, a captain in the British Army, had been an aide to the celebrated Lawrence of Arabia and had a career so glamorous that a fiction writer would have called it unbelievable.

These nine categories will make a long, long list, and one that grows constantly as new names creep into the news. A good morgue will have hundreds and probably thousands of these career sketches.

To get the information, Rod uses a blank form with entries for various sorts of information, such as family, lodge, church, and political connections; occupations, with dates; and honors and achievements. He takes a blank to a person who should be listed in the files and asks to have it filled in. Naturally he doesn't say, "You're almost seventy and might pop off any moment." Instead, he murmurs about having a record for each person whose name appears prominently in the news.

If the information is given in longhand, Rod typewrites it as soon as he returns to the office. Although he can read that longhand now, while his interview with the prominent is fresh in mind, a month from now it may be bafflingly illegible.

From time to time he revises the information to bring it up to date. Here is Fred Strawn, business agent of the Plasterers' union, biographed in a blank twelve years old. What has he done more recently? He may have taken a very active role in the A. F. of L.-C. I. O. warfare of the past few years.

Rod will invest months in enlarging the obit files and more time in keeping them up to date. Unless he does this he cannot hope for the good coverage the city editor demanded. The obit column is built upon the files.

When an undertaker telephones in a death, Rod at once consults the files. "Who was he?" Rod asked the undertaker. "Switchman over at the railroad." It doesn't seem an especially

newsworthy death, but the files may reveal that the switchman was one of the most prominent fraternal leaders in half a dozen states, and the account of his connections with the Masons, Moose, and/or Elks may run more than half a column. Assuming that a person needs only a one-paragraph obit because his economic status was modest is eternally dangerous.

Rod arranges with the police or other reporter who telephones the hospitals at specified intervals to find out the names of all persons on the "danger list." Sometimes this means little, because any patient with worse than bronchitis is on the danger list, but in many cities it is an enormous help. "William D. Jones, danger list, General Hospital." Rod consults the files. Mr. Jones has a biographical sketch that will make nearly a column of type. Rod calls the hospital again. "Just how ill is Mr. Jones?" he asks. "Well, he's eighty-six, and we don't think he'll last out the day." The Jones biography goes into type at once, in case its subject dies ten minutes before press time.

If calling the hospitals is part of Rod's work, he calls at specified hours, and he keeps those hours. The hospital people, always busy, expect a call from the paper at 12:15 noon. Because that call comes every day, the switchboard operator gets into the habit of having information ready at that time. If Rod calls today at 11:50 and tomorrow at 12:50, he inconveniences the hospital employes, who all too often are doing two days' work in one. If his 12:15 call comes then and only then, they cooperate willingly.

#### EMERGENCY BIOGRAPHIES

Sooner or later the files are like Mother Hubbard's cupboard, without a trace of a person worth at least half a column. Rod must then scurry out to the house and get the information that should have been gathered long ago, when circumstances were more favorable. What conditions he will find at the house he can only guess. Everyone there may be so distraught that his task is made miserable, or he may find a "family spokesman," high in self-control, who can give him accurate information quickly.

If time permits, Rod fortifies himself before going to the house

by consulting close friends or associates of the deceased. Their information will be incomplete and part of it inaccurate, but he gets at least a framework on which to arrange the details he will obtain a little later from a member of the family. And here is where the assistance of the undertaker is helpful; the mortician knows how to manage persons who have just lost a member of the family. He can get information that even a reporter might be unable to extract, because the person being interviewed was so upset.

"Obits—humph. Sitting in the office waiting for undertakers to telephone." All wrong, Rod; no member of the staff needs to know the city more thoroughly than does the obit reporter. "Pasquale D'Anini died this morning." Just another member of the foreign colony? Mr. D'Anini may be highly prominent. Rod hurries to the house only to find that the shock of the death has overcome everyone except a cousin, whose English at best is fragmentary and now is limited to one word in ten. The nine words in Italian are beyond Rod. "That fellow's big," the city editor said when Rod informed him of the death. "He's worth half or three quarters of a column." If Rod knows the city as he should, he knows where in the Italian district to find someone who either can tell authoritatively of Mr. D'Anini or can help get the information.

"Henry Reyner dead?" The city editor is really surprised. "Why, twenty years ago he was one of the city's biggest men. Retired a long while ago. All the older residents know him. See three or four of the old timers for tributes to Reyner." Ah, but which three or four? If Rod knows the city, he knows where to go; if he doesn't, he cannot hide his ignorance from the city editor.

Tributes, the statements of regret from prominent residents, give Rod a problem. They should not be used too freely; only the notables or nearly notables are entitled to them. To ask the mayor and four aldermen to weep publicly because of the death of a stenographer, employed two years in the welfare office, is mawkish.

The notables are not necessarily the success-story eminents; journalistically they are notable if they were known to many,

many readers or were persons outstanding in some important respect. The traffic officer stationed at Main and Central Streets for fourteen years may be more of a notable than the alderman from Ward 4. The surgeon whose name Rod has heard less than a dozen times may be so important that every doctors' magazine in the country will give him a full-page obituary. When tributes are in order, obtain them from persons whose comments are worthy. These will be persons in high places or low who had particularly good opportunity to know the deceased. The city's medical men have told the luster of their departed colleague. Perhaps the elevator operator in the surgeon's office building can add a tribute of another but equally worthy sort. "I saw him half a dozen times a day for eighteen years. I never heard him speak sharp or angry. I've seen him so worn out from his work that he'd drop off to sleep riding up to his office on the fourth floor. He was a real doc." What Rod wants in tributes is comment that shows specifically the place the deceased occupied. Gushy lamentation doesn't do this.

### THE BLACK SHEEP

Occasionally Rod runs into a ticklish moment when he finds that the deceased had a smudge upon his escutcheon. He served two years in the state's prison for larceny, or he was disbarred as an attorney for mismanaging an estate. If the man who once was a convict later became mayor, Rod cannot avoid mentioning the prison facet. Whether to mention it usually must be answered "Yes" for a person who was a public character or who occupied an official or other public position. In the case of an entirely private citizen, in public attention only because of a single misstep, the answer almost certainly is "No." Particularly is it "No" if the person has lived down that one stumble.

A much more frequent problem is that of the person who climbed somewhat high on the economic ladder, only to have it slip during his middle or later years and drop him into obvious humbleness. Such instances always are to be found here and there, but the black depression of the early 1930's multiplied their numbers, and for the next twenty years reporters must write the obits of those whose lives were economic failures. Here the

guiding principle of all obituary writing helps greatly: Make the story friendly, sympathetic, and dignified.

Here is an instance: A physician was so overcome by financial reverses during the depression that he fell into a nervous breakdown, from which he never rallied enough to resume practicing medicine. He was reduced to the ten-dollar-a-week job as school traffic guard, shepherding youngsters across a busy street on their way to and from school.

An obituary contrasting his one-time prominence with his later financial abasement would be execrable. So would any but the most skillful attempt to explain his fall; far better to write as if the man's career was normal and ordinary:

John W. Harkness, 59, of 3010 Jamesville Street, school traffic guard at Arlington Avenue and Tenth Street, died at his home last night of heart disease.

Formerly a practicing physician, Dr. Harkness was compelled by failing health to give up medical work in 1933. Since then he had been a crossing guard, work that kept him outdoors and did not tax his physical strength.

No one can fail to know what this means—that Dr. Harkness was unable to stand the mental and emotional battering of the depression—but no one can object to the calmness and reasonableness with which the information is presented. There is no color writing, no attempt to make readers sorry for the doctor.

One form of color writing is impossible: the light or humorous. To refer frivolously to death is to offend thousands of readers. Moreover, the opposite or antonymic form had better be used sparingly. Readers resist an attempt to make them weep. Reporter Rod knows this, and may try to climb above the resistance by piling high the words of grief and dolor. Almost certainly, he overwrites, and the story is maudlin:

Sergt. Gerald Maloney of the police force died last night at his home, 1211 Front Street. For 23 years one of "the city's finest," Sergt. Maloney was a living example of the man who, though of modest place in the world, attains to wide influence and whose passing makes the city a poorer place in which to live.

The copy editor will use threshing-machine tactics on this, and Rod will wonder about the place of "adjectived stories."



The case for the adjectived story, with its "prominent and respected citizen," is thoroughly understandable. When a person dies, he is much more remembered for his likable than for his repellent qualities. Since a newspaper lives by making friends, why should it not combine expediency with psychology by being the first to say loudly, "He was a splendid man, and we shall miss him sorely"?

The opposite argument has three parts: (1) Readers look to the newspaper for objectivity; (2) if the facts are presented clearly, they put the readers into the right mood even better than do adjectives; (3) many persons are of such limited influence that the adjectives proclaim them too loudly, particularly since the same adjectives are used for persons of indisputable eminence.

The architect who designed the city hall about which the public is still bragging may be described as "highly respected," but here is a truck driver of no prominence whatsoever beyond that of having gone for twenty months without even a minor accident. Searching for an adjective, Rod whistles to "respected" and forces it into a duty for which it never enlisted in the language. A nice word, "respected," so Rod uses it again and again. Before long he has used it for so many persons who were not respected beyond the circle of their few acquaintances that the adjective is impotent. Overused, any word is feeble, and the laudatory adjective is feeblest of all.

Rod faces trouble if he adjectives some persons but not all; the friends and relatives of those denied the help of "prominent" and "public-spirited" will be resentful. Safe policy is to adjective no one or to adjective everyone. The former is far better. To the proposal that "adjectives are allowable if limited to persons of some distinction," the reply is: "Where does distinction begin, and how can anyone set a workable dividing line between the adjectived and the unadjectived?" If Rod wishes an obituary to reflect fully the eminence of its subject, he suggests the obituary for page 1 and provides a picture. A straightforward and unadorned telling, in some detail, of a person's career will show at once whether that person was eminent. If his life was so full and rich that its recounting requires three quarters of a column,

a reader will realize the person's prominence with such a comment as, "Heaven's sake, I never realized that Dr. Franklin did all those things."

If the city editor insists that readers are accustomed to bedecked obits and that the adjectives must stay, Rod will acquire a bountiful stock, so that he need not use the same wording five or six times a day. He will also experiment with the "factual adjective," a bit of specific—and objective—information hoisted into the position of the adjective it replaces:

John D. Cowles, for 11 years the captain in command of No. 2 fire station, died this morning. . . .

This has adjective effect yet is completely factual. Compare its power with that of such a statement as this:

John D. Cowles, prominent officer in the fire department, died this morning. . . .

The first specimen was more powerful, because it was explicit and definite. The second was vague and told less. Rod will be surprised how often he can substitute a strong factual statement for an indefinite, meaningless adjective. By so doing he can gradually escape from the adjectived obit story.

### THREE CHANCES TO SLIP

Three things Rod will never do. The first is to assume that, because a person had been retired for some time, he is of little news interest. He may be completely unknown to Rod's generation, but to older readers, who are very, very many, that once-prominent name retains significance. Many an obit reporter has earned the city editor's rebuke because he assumed that a name his own and younger generation rarely had heard of was worth only a two-paragraph obit. The second "*verboden*" is that of judging a person's news worth by his bank account. "He lived in one of those thirty-room mansions on Maple Street; he must have been important" may be true, but "He lived in a four-room apartment on Railroad Avenue; he can't have amounted to anything" often will be horribly untrue. The third "don't" is against letting a person's politics affect his obituary. That he belonged

to the opposition party detracts not one clause from the completeness and the warmth of the obituary. The paper is Democratic and the late Mr. Hoffer was Republican, but that does not justify such a writing as this:

Although Mr. Hoffer was a Republican, he was regarded as one of the most astute businessmen in the city.

Emphatically it does not warrant this:

Mr. Hoffer was several times a candidate for an elective office but never made the grade. His nearest approach was six years ago, when he was Republican candidate for mayor, but he was beaten by somewhat more than the usual margin.

Such bits as these are direct belittlings of the man himself. For all its Democratic devotion, the editorial page never attacked Mr. Hoffer as a man; it condemned his ideas, and nothing more. For the obituary column to suggest that the man himself was objectionable is the meanest show of partisanship.

It is time now to summarize the suggestions about the manner of writing: First, the style should be one of natural, friendly dignity, free from such saccharinities as "he leaves a wife and six children to mourn the tragedy of his untimely passing." Second, whenever possible, use facts rather than adjectives to show a person's eminence.

This second suggestion does not mean that no obituaries should be "interpretive," for some cannot escape passing judgments. Interpretations generally are reserved for public personages, such as an exmayor, and for nonpublic personages about whom the facts do not tell the whole story. Manifestly, it is not enough to say that George W. Clarke was "Mayor for eight consecutive years," if his administration saw the first comprehensive street-paving program, the modernizing of the fire department, the establishment of medical inspection in the public schools, and the retiring of a municipal debt outstanding since the Civil War. These accomplishments will warrant and perhaps demand an evaluation to show how genuine, rather than nominal, they were. The nonpublic person may have been an inventor, unfamiliar to the public, though well known to the patent office.

Rod very soon learns the practices of the various religions.

A Roman Catholic funeral, for example, can be held on Sunday, though this is rare, but the Requiem High Mass will not be celebrated until a weekday. For Rod to jump at the conclusion that, because the funeral will be on Sunday, so will the mass, is to invite caustic letters to the editor in chief, asking why the paper can't get simple things right. Rod may argue that "Requiem High Mass" is adequate and that "solemn" is unnecessary, but Catholic readers much prefer the complete phrasing. The names of the priests who officiate should be used, rather than only the name of the celebrant of the mass. The deacon and subdeacon should be mentioned—and let Rod realize that an ordinary priest may sing the mass, while his ecclesiastically superior monsignor acts as subdeacon. If priests sit in the sanctuary, name them, however numerous. The names of the priests in the sanctuary are as much a part of the story of a Catholic funeral as an abstract of the eulogy is a part of a Protestant funeral.

Writing the obituary shows how orderly a mind Rod possesses. If he is the sort of fellow who never realizes until 1 P.M. that he is wearing one orange and one blue sock, his mental aberrations will make his obit stories confused and jumbled.

#### NEWS IDENTIFICATIONS

The main burden of the obit lead is to identify the person so that readers know at once whether they wish to read of his career. Many persons can be identified in more than one way, and Rod estimates to see which one or two ways would attract the greatest reader interest.

George Fernald died this morning at the age of 56 at his home, 1002 Warburton Avenue.

This is as weak a start as Rod can devise. It suggests that a man living to fifty-six is so unusual as to be newsworthy. But fifty-six is not elderly enough to stir interest; it is hardly more than the middle of middle age. The only identification is Mr. Fernald's address, which is no identification at all. All it says is that he lived in a certain part of town; it in no wise answers a reader's query, "Was this the Fernald I knew?" and it offers

nothing to attract the reader who never before heard of Mr. Fernald.

George Fernald, prominent druggist, died this morning at. . . .

This is little better; it is too incomplete an identification, for most cities have many druggists.

George Fernald, proprietor of the Memorial Square drugstore, died at. . . .

This improves, in that it is more definite; many a reader will say, "Why, I know that drugstore. I've waited in front of it for a bus many a time."

George Fernald, for 32 years proprietor of the Memorial Square drugstore, died at. . . .

This is still better, because it tells still more about Mr. Fernald—not only that he ran a centrally located store but that he was among the longer established businessmen.

George Fernald, for 32 years proprietor of the Memorial Square drugstore and for two years a member of the state board of pharmacy, died at. . . .

This is even more powerful, because it says in effect, "You knew Mr. Fernald as a druggist; think of him now as a state official as well, a man of more than in-the-city prominence." Many a reader will say, "Why, I never dreamed that that old fellow was more than a medicine mixer. What other things about him are surprising? I'd better read on some more."

When a person has several claims to attention, Rod uses a long lead, because he cannot crowd all the items into one paragraph without overloading. He picks the best one or two items for the top paragraph and gives the second to a summary of the other interesting aspects:

George Fernald, for 32 years proprietor of the Memorial Square drugstore and a director of the Community Chest since its foundation in 1927, died this morning at his home, 1002 Warburton Avenue. He was 56.

Mr. Fernald had been a member of the state board of pharmacy for two years. He was a founder of the local camera club and in 1938 was president of the state Federation of Amateur Photographers. He was the first worshipful master of the Mt. Morrison lodge of Masons.

This structure offers within compact compass a variety of interest-angles, so that a reader can see at a glance whether the subject of the obit touched upon one of his own concerns. A reader to whom cameras are life's finest fascination may care nothing about George Fernald as a druggist, but when he is reminded that Mr. Fernald was a fellow lensman, he will read. Which information to put into the top paragraph and which to sink to the second depends upon Rod's analysis. Ordinarily Rod will lift to the first paragraph one or both of these identifications:

1. An aspect with which many readers can find a personal familiarity, even though it be slight: George Fernald was presented as the proprietor of a store known to almost all readers and patronized by many. The first paragraph would evoke such a reader link as this, "I know that store—pass it every day. So the fellow that ran it is dead. That's too bad." And the reader reads on.

2. An aspect which will impress many readers, though it in no way cuts across their own personal interests: George Fernald was presented also as a long-time director of the Community Chest, and hence a person of importance. The death of a "big man" is automatically interesting.

The long lead has its strength in the fragmentary presentation of many items rather than the detailed offering of only one. Consider this version:

George Fernald, for 32 years proprietor of the Memorial Square drugstore, died this morning at his home, 1002 Warburton Avenue. He was 56. Mr. Fernald was one of the city's oldest druggists, being exceeded in length of establishment only by Andrew Scott, who has operated the store at 602 Western Avenue for 34 years, and William Macaulay, who has run the White Front store on Benton Street for 33 years. Mr. Fernald for the past two years had been a member of the state board of pharmacy.

Born in. . . .

This structure gives a much more complete early picture of Mr. Fernald but leaves out utterly any interest angles except the pharmaceutical. Readers to whom the Community Chest, photographic, or lodge connections might be interesting will not know that those aspects are in the story unless they read it at length. They may not read at length, for nothing in the lead suggests that Mr. Fernald was interesting except as a druggist. Some of the younger Masons may recall Mr. Fernald as "one of us" but, not realizing that he was onetime master of their lodge, may dismiss the story because its start is entirely pharmaceutical.

#### GOOD STRUCTURE IS ESSENTIAL

An obituary is coherent or it is a failure. The poor obits shovel at the reader a half-ton of information, dispersive, discursive, disorganized, and demand that he fit it into some sort of order. To avoid this, Rod emphasizes throughout a single theme or impression, to "give the reader something to remember the man by." As an instance, the former principal of the city's largest high school has died. He had not one career but three. Until the age of sixty-five he was an educator and also an antiquarian and an authority upon the state's early history. After leaving schoolwork, he was too restless to remain idle and picked up astronomy as a hobby. He built himself several telescopes and became somewhat known as an amateur star chaser. To combine these three activities, Rod adopts as the unifying thread such an idea as "Mr. Johnson was a man of perpetual activity; he was always at work on something." This theme at once illuminates the man's three activities—schoolmastering, antiquarianism, and astronomy—because it places these widely separated items over a common denominator and relates each one to the idea, "He had to be busy all the time."

To assist coherence, Rod gives the story a rigid structure. It has four elements: (1) The lead, with the news identifications and often with the circumstances of death; (2) the genealogy, or list of relatives; (3) the funeral arrangements; (4) the biographical sketch.

Each element is presented in a block instead of being split throughout the story. The genealogy is all together in, for ex-

ample, paragraphs 4, 5, and 6; it is not diffused, with most of it in paragraphs 4 and 5 and the rest in paragraph 16, long after the reader decided that he now knew all the family history and had gone on to other material.

These elements can be arranged in four designs:

The first structure is: Block 1, lead; Block 2, genealogy; Block 3, funeral plans; Block 4, biographical sketch. This is an effective system when the person was so well known that his obituary is indisputably of high interest.

The second method is: Block 1, lead; Block 2, biographical sketch; Block 3, funeral plans; Block 4, relatives. This sequence is particularly good when the person, despite his importance, was not actively in the public attention and the biography is needed high in the story to show readers unacquainted with the person's name that his career was noteworthy.

If the biography is long, it can be split, thereby furnishing the other two structures. The divided biography is a device taken over from the wire services and consists of a condensed or high-light sketch and a more detailed presentation.

The third structure is: Block 1, lead; Block 2, high lights of biography; Block 3, relatives; Block 4, funeral plans; Block 5, details of biography. This arrangement is particularly good when many readers will be satisfied with only a part of the biography. It gives them the high spots in a few paragraphs and leaves the details at the bottom, available for the more interested reader but not "inflicted" upon the casual reader.

The fourth structure keeps the two-part biography closer together: Block 1, lead; Block 2, condensed biography; Block 3, detailed biography; Block 4, relatives; Block 5, genealogy. This system is eminent for a person of many activities, for Block 2, the compressed sketch, is a good pattern on which to fit the details that follow in Block 3, the detailed biography.

The biographical sketch is simply a logical arrangement of material, so presented as to show its orderliness. It begins at birth and works on chronologically until death, or it goes in the other direction, telling of death first and working back to birth. Thus:



<i>Chronological</i>	<i>Reversed Chronology</i>
Born 1895 . . .	Recent career . . .
Educated at . . .	Main career . . .
First job . . .	Marriage and children . . .
Marriage and children . . .	First job . . .
Main career . . .	Educated . . .
Career after retirement . . .	Born at . . .

In either structure, a reader knows after a few paragraphs the direction of the biography and thereby can anticipate what the reporter will say next. The reverse chronology is preferable for a person who was important but not necessarily prominent and for a person, regardless of his prominence, who did most of his work in his later years. This structure puts up front the more recent facts of the person's life and thereby links him more obviously to "today," instead of starting with "born in 1895," which may seem so far in the past that the reaction is, "That was long, long ago—what's interesting about him?" Thus:

George T. Young, inventor, died last night at his home, 21 Berkely Street, after a heart attack. He was 63.

Mr. Young only a few months ago was granted three patents for a new carburetion system for automobile engines. They. . .

Before his work on automobile motors, Mr. Young developed and synchronized a traffic light, now in use in many cities. It. . .

For nearly ten years, Mr. Young specialized in railroad appliances, and one of his improvements is now used in many car vestibules. . . .

His first inventions were mainly in the field of. . . .

The casual reader may never have heard of George Young, but the fact that Mr. Young very recently did some things with automobile engines shows that he was a "timely" or "contemporary" character. Such a treatment will attract the casual reader more than a statement that, in 1909, Mr. Young took out his first patent on a potato peeler.

When a person had more than one career, as frequently happens, the biography is divided so that each career is presented in a block and thus kept from spilling over into the others, at the cost of coherence. Fred Lyford was businessman, churchman, and chess enthusiast. Each aspect is isolated, so that his emi-

nence in the chess world is in one place in the story instead of turning up in bits in the middle of the business career and of the church career. The diverse activities are classified into divisions or fields, and each field is then presented completely and separately, without overlapping. Thus:

*(Block 1: The lead)*

Fred Lyford, retired merchant who had been active in Unitarian churchwork and in chess circles, died suddenly this morning at his home, 145 Elmwood Avenue. He was 68.

*(Block 2: Biographical high lights)*

For more than 25 years, until his retirement eight years ago, Mr. Lyford was proprietor of the Arcade Furniture Company on Main Street. He was a cofounder of the Church of the Unity, and was the director of the campaign for funds which enabled the church, in 1929, to build its present edifice and parish house on South Street. Because of Mr. Lyford's assistance, the Tricounty Chess Club attained a membership of more than 200, the largest roster of any such club in the country.

*(Block 3: The relatives)*

Mr. Lyford leaves his widow, the former Anne Dresden; two sons, Edgar, a major in the Army, stationed at Washington, and William, a member of the political science faculty at Atherton College; and two daughters, Mrs. Roscoe White, Binghamton, N.Y., and Mrs. George S. Dane, Toledo, O.

*(Block 4: The funeral)*

The funeral will be held Friday afternoon at 2:30 at the Church of the Unity. The pastor, the Rev. Ogden Whitman, will officiate. Burial will be in Greenlawn cemetery.

*(Block 5: The biography. This biography begins chronologically and then treats each of Mr. Lyford's activities separately, in the order of their mention in Block 2.)*

Mr. Lyford was born in 18— at North Pownal, Vt., the son of Richard and Elvira Lyford. After being graduated from Bennington (Vt.) High School, he worked in Burlington, Vt., for two years, and then came to this city in 18—, when he was 21. He had lived here ever since.

He worked for three years as a clerk in the Denham hardware store, then located on Burnside Street. He married Miss Dresden in —, and in the next year became a clerk in the Arcade furniture store.

The only public office Mr. Lyford held was that of public library trustee, 1918 to 1920. He was elected on the Republican ticket.

He was a member of the Faith and Works Lodge of Masons and the Rotary Club.

(First of his three careers)

In 1903 Mr. Lyford became assistant manager of the Arcade store and in 1905 he became treasurer of the company. When the then owner, George T. Randolph, retired in —, Mr. Lyford purchased the business, which he operated until —, when he retired and sold the company to a syndicate of its employes.

During his ownership, the company increased its store space several times, until it occupied four floors of the Arcade Building, 320 Main Street. The last enlargement was made the year before Mr. Lyford retired.

(Second of his three careers)

When Mr. Lyford came to this city, the Unitarians worshipped in a single rented room in the second floor of the Hoffman Building, on James Street. He affiliated with the church immediately upon his arrival here and was one of a group of 50 members who underwrote the funds necessary for building the denomination's first church, in 1910, at the corner of Brickett and Marshall Streets. This building cost \$18,000.

By 1928 the membership had grown so that the original church was too small, and Mr. Lyford was selected as director of a solicitation to enable the erection of a larger building. The campaign began Jan. 1, 1929, and ended May 1, with pledges and subscriptions totaling \$40,000. Construction began at once, and the church was in use in November.

At the first service in the new church, the pastor, the Rev. Thomas Grant, thanked Mr. Lyford for his work, "conducted in so restrained a manner that donations were made voluntarily rather than because of pressure and coercion."

(Third of his three careers)

Always an enthusiastic chess player, Mr. Lyford became a member of the City Chess Club in 1912 and in 1913 directed the first county championship contest, in which 26 players competed. The contests were continued until 1925. In that year more than 100 players took part.

Mr. Lyford in 1926 arranged the consolidation of the local and the Pittsfield clubs. In 1928 the Nortonville club joined the organization, which then adopted the name, Tricounty Chess Club. Through Mr. Lyford's frequent visits to Pittsfield and Nortonville, the branches of the club in those cities expanded their membership. Last year the local unit had 102 members, Pittsfield 64, and Nortonville 48, giving the consolidated club the largest membership of any chess organization in the country.

Rod may do a splendid job of organizing the material and yet write a tiresome obit. This will be due to poor sentence structure. The obit is a wearying "he," "he," "he," "he," "he," "he." To avoid this, Rod polishes the writing so that consecutive sentences do not begin with the same word.

As a final caution, Rod reads over his story to make certain that it contains no superlatives and few if any comparatives. The superlative almost always is inaccurate, and some readers will know it:

Mr. Brickett was the most successful furniture dealer in the city and his store was known throughout the state.

Whereupon an old timer writes a letter to the editor and points out that Frank Turnbull, who died in 1925, had a store three times as large and made much more money than did Mr. Brickett. The comparatives are to be used sparingly, because they seem to be trying too hard to impress readers with the person's importance. The comparative is a double-strength adjective and should be saved for double-strength facts.

Rod wonders how much the obit column is worth. Then comes a telephone call for "the reporter who wrote that story about my husband's death." Rod asks himself what went wrong with the story; he was confident he had his facts right. "That was written just the way he would have liked it," the widow says. "I want to get twenty-five copies of that issue to send to the relatives." Rod breathes easy again. He tells the city editor, who says the whole thing in one sentence:

"They never forget an obit, good or bad; what they think of the paper for the next fifty years is what they thought about that one obit."

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## 28

### WEATHER STORIES

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#### ALWAYS PAGE-I NEWS

‘SIX BELOW ZERO, and still going down,” the cub moans as he clumps into the office, his feet encased in galoshes and his face swathed in a patent pull-down cap that hides all but his eyes. “Man, what a day. I hope the boss has a nice, last-all-day meeting for me, so I can sit on a radiator three or four hours and thaw out.”

“Sorry, Don,” the city editor murmurs, “but I’m going to expand your education by having you do the weather today.”

“Ouuuuch,” the cub groans. “That means I have to buck the wind all day long.”

Perhaps Don won’t need to be an icicle, for weather stories sometimes can be written from the comfort of the office, with all their information gathered by telephone. Other times not.

Being assigned to “do the weather” is an indication that Don is developing and that the city editor regards him as potentially a good reporter. Weather stories are immensely interesting and are getting more so. They are interesting to read and also to write.

They are top-column copy, usually landing on the first page and with surprising frequency becoming the lead story. What Congress did yesterday may be cut to five inches, but the weather story is sacrosanct, and the most hard-boiled make-up editor hasn’t enough armadillo in him to drop the last quarter-column.

The weather is page-i copy because it affects everyone, and more so each year. Go back half a century. What did a blizzard do to the countryside? It blocked the roads, but no one ex-

pected to travel during bad weather. The only persons seriously inconvenienced were the few who needed a doctor in a hurry, ran short of groceries, or required more furnace coal. Travel and communications were impeded, but that was about all.

See now what a blizzard does today. It pulls down wires, which means that lights are off; radios are silent; oil burners go cold; electric refrigerators shut off; telephones are mute. Half a century ago there were no electric lights, no radios, no oil burners, no electric refrigerators, and few telephones. Today's blizzard cripples the railroads as did the bad weather of fifty years ago, and it also cripples busses, private automobiles, trucks, and airplanes. The storm today brings intense cold, and car owners must verify that they have enough antifreeze, an item that didn't worry the men of fifty years ago.

Because we are today so much more mobile, more of us feel a storm than did our grandfathers who pretty much stayed put. Grandfather spent the evening at his farm home; grandson drives in to town at 7:15 to attend a movie, and he may be seriously inconvenienced upon emerging at 11 o'clock to learn that he cannot start his car because the crankcase oil has congealed. Grandfather smiled and said, "I guess we have enough kerosene to keep the lamps lighted until I can get in to town and buy some more"; grandson's electric lights go out, and he probably hasn't even a candle as an emergency substitute. Grandfather looked at the thermometer and heaved another chunk of wood into the pot-bellied stove; grandson wraps in blankets and suffers until the electric power is restored and the oil burner or the stoker can go into action again. If grandfather had to make a train trip on a blizzard day, he expected that the thirty-mile-an-hour express would be two hours late; if grandson travels, he expects that the ninety-mile streamliner will be on schedule and is disgusted if he misses a forty-minute connection at Chicago.

Whenever the weather is unusual, the entire population is affected; the weather is the one universally interesting subject.

#### GATHERING INFORMATION

How Reporter Don collects his information depends entirely on how well he knows the city. The effects of the storm on one

street will be far different from those on another. He could wander Pine, Cherry, Mulberry, and Chestnut Streets all day without seeing evidence of traffic being disrupted, because conditions on those streets are not quite right. Maple Street has a slight hill, but cars have little difficulty climbing it. Harrison Street has a hill no longer and no steeper, but traffic slips and skids all day long, no matter how vigorously the street-department workmen toss sand. Atop Harrison Street hill is a stop sign, and after a car obediently halts, it must churn and scrape to regain traction. The car behind has an even harder time and probably slides backward fifteen or twenty feet, meantime polishing the snow into a dirty and extremely slippery ice. Within ten minutes Harrison Street hill is all glaze, and the sand men's ministrations remedy it only a short while. Then more cars slide, more ice is formed, more sand is spread, and traffic moves once more, until the slide-ice-sand cycle is repeated again and yet again.

The reporter who knows the town knows where these places are, and can get eyewitness material without wasting time.

He knows the city for all kinds of weather. If it is a summer heat wave, he knows that Crescent Street will have higher temperatures than Berkeley Avenue. If it is a rainstorm, he knows that the Garfield Avenue sewers clog sooner than those under Pinckney Street. Thus, for each breed of weather he has a list of places to visit or to inquire about, as he determines how the daily routine is being dislocated. He learns to judge weather by seeing how much these revealing places are affected. The spring thaws and rains are bringing high water. The reporter drives out Westby Road to the Frog Hole. The road is still seven feet above water; no floodlet yet. Really high water won't arrive until the road at Frog Hole is inundated, and when it is, there's no hesitation in saying that flood time has come.

Don, however, is doing his first storm story; never before has he thought of the city in terms of weather. Let us see if he can devise a list of news sources that will give him a quick size-up:

1. Police station: Here he can learn about accidents, especially traffic mishaps. Snow, sleet, and rain bring more automobile misadventures than do mere cold or heat. On a blizzard day he can expect the police station to yield him a good handful of

news. On a torrid August day he expects to learn there about drownings and near drownings, and about ambulance calls for sunstroke victims.

2. Fire station: He is unlikely to find much here in the summertime, unless the firemen are custodians of the inhalators used to resuscitate drowning and gas victims, but in winter the fire house may have considerable news for him. The October cold snap means chimney fires, as furnaces months in disuse are fired again without being cleaned. The February twenty-two-below day means more chimney fires, as furnaces are pushed beyond their capacity.

3. Hospitals: Yes, for almost any kind of weather. Cold weather means freezings, fatal or merely of the ears; rainy or icy weather, bones broken when pedestrians slipped and fell; snowy weather, householders whose weak hearts gave out as they shoveled the walks; hot weather, sunstrokes.

4. City street department: Almost any kind of weather. Hot days, how many tar pavements melted? Rain, how many washouts and where? (The police will tell how traffic is being detoured until the streets are reopened.) Sleet or ice, how many tons of sand and cinders were spread on the slippery spots, which slippery spots, how many men in the sanding crews, how much will the work cost? Snow, how many trucks, plows, and shovelers engaged in clearing the streets, which streets were tackled first and why, which highways are not yet open, when will they be plowed, and how much will it all cost?

5. City sewer department: Unpromising except for cloud-burst and high-water stories. Which streets were flooded, how badly, how long, how was the water finally drained away?

6. City park department: Formerly a news source only in summertime; how many people went to the parks, how much popcorn did they buy, which sports did they play and which did they omit because it was too hot? Now the park department is an all-year source. Winter questions will include queries about what happened to the skating rinks, toboggan slide, and ski jump. At other seasons, the condition of the municipal golf links and tennis courts must be inquired into eagerly.

7. Street railway, railroads, bus lines, airports: How well or



badly were schedules maintained, specifically, where did trouble come, when, why, how was it or will it be remedied?

8. County and state highway departments: How are the roads outside the city, where are the traffic tie-ups, how bad are they, what is being done, when will the tie-ups be cleared, how much expense did the storm cause? Winter storms mean snow-blocked roads, summer storms mean washouts from the inundating rains.

9. Electric light and power companies, telephone, and telegraph systems: Were any lines put out of commission, where, why, when will they be restored, how many men are making the repairs, how much will the repairs cost? The radio station may be worth a query: Which "imported" or network programs were lost when the telephone lines went out, what roundabout circuits were adopted to regain communication with the major originating stations?

10. Hotels: How many commuters, suburbanites, or visiting theatergoers couldn't get home last night and had to stay in town? This will be a wintertime query. In summer the hotels now yield less than formerly because air conditioning exempts them somewhat from the torridness, but the cocktail and dining rooms may furnish some "escape" material.

11. Garages: What did the bad weather do to or for business? If the mercury drops to five below by 4 P.M., every inch of overnight storage space is likely to be rented by 6 o'clock and the garages will have stories of frantic motorists offering five dollars to get their machines into warm places.

12. Stores: How much was business cut down, how much was the boom in demand for galoshes, umbrellas, or swim suits?

13. Weather bureau: Why did the weather go so far astray, exactly how errant was it, and when will it return to normal?

14. County agricultural agent: What did the storm do to the present crops or to the prospects of next season's crops?

This is a sample list. Each city has its own and sometimes peculiar places where weather information lurks. In one town a lake boathouse is queried in summertime about the number of canoes rented; in another the fish and game club is interrogated in winter to find out how its pheasant planting has been affected. The crux is that Don, albeit he is a freshman, quickly can concoct

a list of sources to tap as he builds the picture of the bad weather.

The city editor may turn a photographer loose to get whatever pictures he can or may have the lensman work with Don, so that story and pictures will overlap more completely. In this second case, Don collects his information speedily, so that he can tell the cameraman where to go while the pictures are still there. He calls the police station and is told, "They're having trouble on Morse's Hill." If the photographer arrives speedily he may find a splendid snowbound traffic picture, but if he is tardy the police and the sand crews have done their work and there is no picture.

How much Don obtains by telephone and how much by going to the scene varies with each story. Don must understand what he learns by telephone so thoroughly that he can judge whether he would get enough more by going to the spot to make that journey worth while. "Big bus has skidded right across Glover Street, blocked it completely. There's a line of stalled cars a mile long in each direction." This sounds interesting enough to justify personal inspection. "Telephone alarm, Box 723, Harrison and Conway—chimney fire." Unless further information comes quickly, this doesn't look like a demand for Don to risk frostbitten ears.

Don works in conjunction with the county editor, who is learning from his correspondents what the weather did in the nearby towns. From the editor Don gets the most interesting weather items, which he combines into a "with story" to accompany his local chronicle.

#### EVERY-STORY ITEMS

Whatever the brand of bad weather, certain staple information must be learned: (1) When did it start? (2) just how bad is it? (3) what caused it? (4) how long will it last?

Mr. Haskins, 1016 Denver Street, and Mr. Randolph, 1018 Denver Street, are shoveling their front walks at 7:10 A.M.:

*Mr. Haskins:* "Devil of a lot of snow. Hadn't started at 1:30 when I finished DX-ing with the radio."

*Mr. Randolph:* "You're wrong there. It began before 11 o'clock; I know because I went out then to lock the garage."

Mr. Haskins and Mr. Randolph will read the paper eagerly, and one will call up the other to say, "That snow started about the time I said it did, Henry. It says so in the paper."

"Exactly how bad is it?" is a universal question, because everyone has a different way of measuring the weather. Homer White, ear-muffled, exclaims as he enters his office, "Cracky, it's cold. Eight below at my place." Fred Timberman retorts loftily, "Your thermometer's crazy, Homer. Mine said one above zero."

"What caused it?" is of perpetual interest, because almost everyone is an amateur meteorologist, with his own explanation of the bad weather. He will read the paper to see whether the government observers agree with his explanation.

"How long will it last?" is asked whether the weather is good or bad. Floyd Harper is interested in the prospects for more snow; he will not drive to Junctionville tomorrow if snow is predicted, for he dislikes fighting a storm.

#### FREAKS OF GEOGRAPHY

Every city has its "weather freaks," which year after year yield interesting feature bits. Shippan's Pond is protected from the prevailing wind by a high bluff. Elsewhere the wind whitecaps the water so that fishermen go home in disgust, but Shippan's remains quiet and a five-pound pickerel pays the penalty of too much curiosity. Knowing that Shippan's Pond is such a freak, Don works it into every windstorm story. Steuben Hill, on Amostown Road, comes into the news each fall because its temperature is about seven degrees lower than that of the rest of the city. An early November rain is wet elsewhere, but atop Steuben Hill it becomes sleet or ice, and the weather story includes two paragraphs about the difficulties cars had on this eminence until the streets department remembered the region's perversity and sent out a load of sand.

That these peculiarities are recounted over and over does not dim their interest, for readers become acquainted with them and look to see whether Shippan's Pond and Steuben Hill are "acting up" as usual.

Don keeps his use of these tidbits in a strict perspective, labeling them as freaks, so that no one can assume mistakenly that they

represented the whole city's experience. By consulting selected thermometers, Don could make almost any bit of weather seem much worse than really it is. That isn't "doing the weather"; it's outright faking.

### PEGGING THE STORY

Don has six angles upon which to hang his story. They are:

1. The result of the weather: This is often the most impressive and spectacular material; readers have seen and felt the weather, and now they learn how powerfully berserk was the climate they endured. "I didn't realize it was *that* bad; sakes alive, we were out in a real storm." When a reader exclaims in this wise, he will give the newspaper more than the usual attention. The region raises tobacco; the August hail lasted only six minutes, but it did \$110,000 damage to the nicotine crop. That fact, reinforced by vivid descriptions of the bedraggled fields, will make the story powerful.

2. The causes of the weather: There was no low-pressure blanket coming down from the northwest, yet the city had four hours of snow. That snow didn't have the right passports; it shouldn't have come. Answering "What caused it?" will hold the interest of many readers.

3. The forecast: For five days it has rained, and even the tabbycats are growing web feet. Everyone is asking, "How much more of this?" The story emphasizing "It will rain again tomorrow" or "This is the last day of it" will be read eagerly.

4. The extent of the bad weather: This is an especially good angle when the weather was extreme—subzero rather than a mere "cold wave." Readers will be particularly aware of the weather and will be asking each other, "Was it this bad anywhere else or did we have a monopoly on the grief?" That three quarters of the nation froze and even the deep South had frost will be a splendid approach. The telegraph editor can provide a summary of the weather-at-large to hook into the local account.

5. A comparison or contrast with the past: This, too, fits the extreme weather. When the mercury stretches to ninety-five before 7 A.M., half the city's residents ask, "Isn't it terrible?" and the other half answer, "Yes, but it was worse in 1936. Don't

you remember that summer?" A story comparing the present unpleasantness with that of other years will be read widely, because it fits so easily into what readers already are talking about.

6. Curious or unusual aspects: Good as is this material, it can be overdone. The heat has killed two persons and prostrated six others, truck gardeners' crops have shriveled, business has boiled away to almost nothing—and the reporter stresses that it was so hot that a spilled egg actually did half fry on the sidewalk. The freaks of the weather are always usable, but they are not the backbone of a story that has substantial material along other lines. If this is the sixth above-100 day, and the only thing to say is, "More of it," a story built upon freak news may be justified.

#### PITFALLS

Several dangers grin alluringly at Don. The first is that of bromidic writing. "Jack Frost paid his first visit of the season to the city this morning" is nothing short of atrocious. Back in 1870 city editors were asking, "Can't you find a newer wording than this worn-out Jack Frost business?" The "March lamb" also should be slaughtered, though he's so ancient now that he will be good only for dog food. Referring to "Jupiter Pluvius" suggests that some rain fell, but it gives the weather writer no luster in the city editor's scorebook.

The second danger is that of failure to realize that weather varies with the region. Don forgot to learn the direction of the wind that swept the snow into the city. He asks Harry, who came to the Midwest two years ago from Maine. Harry, busy with his own story, replies without stopping to think about it, "Northeast wind." Down in Maine a northeast wind does bring a storm, but in Minnesota or Wisconsin the bad weather comes out of the west and a northeast wind means that the storm is done. Don doesn't realize that as he writes about "snow howling into the city on the frigid wings of a lashing northeast wind." Plenty of readers will know that a greenhorn wrote the story.

"Red sky by night, seafarers' delight," writes Don, nicely mangling an old quotation which wouldn't register even if he had remembered it aright, because his is an inland state without a

single sailor. Don has forgotten that the language must be tailored to the region and that an epigram of instant significance on the seaboard can be blank and empty in a waterless region.

Yesterday Don wrote a political story in which he did a little forecasting. "On weather" today, he wishes to assure readers that tomorrow will be warm and comfortable. The official forecast announced "continued cold," but the thermometer outside the office has risen five degrees in four hours. "It will get warmer," Don persists. "The forecast's flukey." Perhaps so, but the forecast is official, and it is relied upon by so many farmers and businessmen that Federal law provides penalties for anyone issuing his own forecast in such a way that it might be mistaken for the government's. If Don insists upon forcing his own optimism into the story, he labels it as such and isn't surprised if a copy editor deletes it.

Don is twenty-two. The snowstorm is a crackerjack, and he thinks exultingly of an out-of-the-past story. He scoots to the office library and thumbs through the blizzard section of the card index. "Blizzard of 1888" he finds, with about thirty references. No other blizzard has more than five or six. The bound volume for 1888 has an inch of dust atop it, but Don hauls it down and skims through a few accounts of that year's historic bad weather. His story contrasts today's storm with that of 1888, so long ago that few readers aged less than sixty-five can remember it. Let the harking back be to weather recent enough that many readers can remember it and thus share directly in the remembering.

Despite these restrictions, the weather story gives Don one of his best chances to exploit his originality in writing. Any new and appropriate phrasings he can coin are welcome, for the weather so often is described in worn-out wordings that a fresh approach has double power. Picture painting is allowable almost always, but it must be an effective painting. One word that provokes the wrong picture undoes all that its companions have built up. "A sixty-mile-an-hour wind *chattered* through the city this morning. . . ." It didn't. "Chattered" is a simian, shrill sound, and a sixty-mile wind is full-throated and heavy. That one word wrecks the picture.

Three other injunctions raise their voices. The first is that a weather story often expands so much that its complete telling stretches into three columns. Inevitably, many bits of strong information must be submerged. Ask the city editor about splitting the weather into several stories. Thus:

First story, straight news account of what happened in the city itself; second story, constructed after conference with the state editor, a roundup telling how the nearby towns fared; third story, weather freaks, interesting but out of place in a straight news chronicling; fourth story, comparison or contrast with the bad blows of yesteryear; fifth story, the forecast for tomorrow. Other divisions sometimes will be possible; as an instance, a separate story might be made of what the weather did to transportation or of the efforts to dig the region out of the drifted snow.

Dividing the weather gives each string of information more prominence than it would have if all the strings were tied into one transcontinentally long story. Before splitting the weather, however, consult city and news editors to learn how many splits can be made. The news editor may have room on the front page to start only three weather stories, and if Don writes five he must expect that two of them will go on inside pages.

The second injunction is to cherish statistics. Usually statistics are impersonal and soggy, but here they hitch directly to reader interest. The cloudburst flooded all the city except the hill section; worse, it washed out streets and undermined pavements. Police and street department men have blocked off the dangerous spots, and traffic is subjected to a series of detours. John Harrington, office employe of the Gas and Electric Company, doesn't know it yet, but his usual drive of 1.8 miles from work to home this afternoon will consume 3.4 miles, because of two detours.

In the story the list of closed streets would come about the eighteenth or nineteenth paragraph, too far down to be helpful to headline scanners. Put the statistics, the list of unavailable streets, into a separate story and mark it "Ruled Insert with Local Weather," so that the make-up editor can incorporate it with a bit of typographical dexterity into the top of the main story,

where readers must see it almost as soon as they are done with the headline. It will look like this:

A 45-minute downpour beginning at 9:45 this morning inundated many streets, flooded hundreds of store and home cellars, and halted traffic.

The East Side suffered most, though reports of damage came from all parts of the city. All electric service, except telephone, was cut off for half an hour. Railroad service was delayed

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#### Six Streets Are Closed

Dangerous because of washouts caused by the storm, the following streets have been closed:

Elm, from Franklin to Harrison.

Larch, from Monroe to Jefferson.

Omaha, from First to Third.

St. Paul, from Ninth to 16th.

Belmont avenue, from Kemp to Whiting.

Rochdale, from Rochelle to Van Buren.

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as much as an hour. The express to Chicago, due at 10:35, arrived at 11:30.

When the storm began. . . .

The third warning is to be moderate in using superlatives. A young reporter hasn't seen a great deal of weather, and what seems to him a violent departure from normal may, to older persons, be interesting but far from epochal. If Don is too free with "the worst," "the hottest," and "the coldest," the editor in chief will receive some letters citing other weather, discouragingly recent, that was much, much worse.

#### LONG LEADS OFTEN THE BEST

Weather-story structure often employs a main lead and a secondary lead. The subject matter is so interesting that a long lead, even half a column, is permissible before the elaborations begin. Trying to crowd a lead into one paragraph has wrecked many a story. The weather hits too many people and in too many ways for the stubby lead to be of more than occasional usefulness.



Very often the lead and the secondary lead can be separated by a bit of picture painting:

*(Lead)*

With the temperature at more than 100 degrees, the city today broiled in the second day of the sweltering heat that is parching the entire state. The forecast said, "Fair tomorrow and continued warm."

*(Picture paragraph)*

Pavement on Conway Street attested the intensity of the heat, when the tar melted and a street railway bus sank in almost to the wheel hubs. Unable to pull out of the sticky mass, the bus waited for a wrecker, which also dug in until the rear axle was in the tar. The two vehicles were still stuck at 2:45 this afternoon, waiting for cooler weather to harden the tar enough so that they could get traction and pull out of the black quagmire.

*(Secondary lead)*

Business was hampered even more than yesterday. Few shoppers were in the stores, and those few bought little. Only ice-cream counters and beer parlors reported brisk business. Several factories reported that many employees did not appear today. The Gas and Electric Company brought in case after case of cool drinks for its furnace-room crew.

Market gardens suffered as. . .

The traditional order, "Convert a negative statement into a positive," has no meaning in a weather story. "No heat prostrations were reported" is far better than the wrenching necessary for the positive but awkward "Residents escaped heat prostrations."

Don draws a heavy line between specific details so valuable that they must ride high in the story and those of minor importance, which can be characterized rather than said directly in the top paragraphs. Details which many readers will ask about must be given specifically at their first mention. The forecast declares, "Colder tonight; probable minimum temperature ten to fifteen degrees below zero." The first thing readers wish to know is, "How cold will it be tonight?" The "ten to fifteen below," rather than a characterization such as "even colder tonight," must be in the lead.

Secondary details are left until later in the chronicle. "It is

the third subzero day, but twice the mercury climbed half a step. At 10 o'clock this morning it rose from seven to six below, then declined, and about one this afternoon made another try and pulled from nine to eight below, but failed to hold the gain and was again nine below at 2:30." To get all this detail into the lead is impossible and needless. Foreshadow it with a characterization:

. . . twice the temperature rose slightly but soon sank again. . . .

and give the complete arithmetic lower in the story.

The weather's effects generally are mixed. Despite the fact that the storm brought distress and suffering, here and there it had a humorous touch. Icicles formed on the summertime sign, "Cool Inside—Only 70 Degrees," which a soda fountain manager had forgotten to haul in when the dog days were done. Don must decide whether to make this tidbit a part of his main story, thereby breaking its mood of melancholy, or to use it in the side-light or freaks story. If the melancholy is deep and black, Don had better use the tidbit in the side-light account; it would too much damage the tenor of the main chronicle. If, however, the main story is a little flat, because the weather was only mildly bad, Don will be safe in leaving in such a minor departure from the general trend and in limiting the side story to fewer but more striking bits.

Don remembers that weather changes rapidly. At 10:30 he found from the local office of the state highway department that the trunk roads were open and safe. At 1:30 he had better verify that information; some main roads now may be icebound, and a warning to that effect may keep motorists from unnecessarily risking a slippery journey.

The weather folo story is easy to write. The first-day account done, Don lists the items about which information is incomplete. The school at Becket Summit was closed because of drifted roads. The city park department reported that the toboggan slide would be out of service "for a day or so" until it could be resurfaced.

When the city editor asks next day for a "storm folo," Don begins by asking the state editor what word he has received about reopening the Summit school and asking the park department

when the toboggan slide will once more be in use. Going through the list of "incompletes" gives him at least the start for his story and often the entire story, particularly if the weather has returned to decency. The street department now knows whether the snow-removal cost will be \$3,000 or \$4,000. Revision of the casualty list is often necessary. The first-day story said that one man died of heart attack while shoveling snow and that two pedestrians and two motorists were hurt because of icy sidewalks and highways. The second-day accounting may have a fatal freezing, three more pedestrians and five more motorists injured.

Ten years ago reporters assumed that the accident angle would ride high in a weather story; today it is frequently a minor aspect. Perhaps automobiles are so much better now; perhaps drivers really are more careful—whatever the causes, bad weather often produces a shorter traffic casualty list than does an enticingly beautiful day, when everyone wishes to loll along at sixty-five or seventy and let the breezes do their utmost in cooling.

"Don, take the weather as a regular assignment."

Don now is a "specialist reporter"; he has a field in which he is the office expert. He's a little nearer the top of the long, long ladder.

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## 29

### REWRITES AND FOLOS

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#### WARMED-OVER NEWS

CLYDE DOESN'T KNOW whether to be proud or mournful. For the fifth consecutive day he has been kept inside the office, doing rewrites of stories clipped from the morning paper.

The uncertainty comes from the fact that "rewrites" has two meanings. Sometimes, indeed, the word refers to a rehashing of stories previously printed in another paper. Assigning Clyde to this uninspiring routine may be the city editor's handiest way of training the new reporter in the journalistic virtues, especially the virtue of brevity. Clyde must say nearly as much in 100 words as the other reporter did in 300. A month or so of such rigorous writing will give Clyde a crisp and compact style.

On metropolitan papers the "rewrites" may be of an entirely different nature. The city is so large that reporters would spend too much time in travel from office to story and back to office. The "leg men" who cover many stories telephone the news to the "rewrite desk" at the office, and the rewrite men do the actual writing. These rewrite men often are among the most capable members of the staff and are looked up to with deserved admiration by the cubs. Small-city papers occasionally use this system of rewrite, usually for last-minute stories when the saving of seconds is of paramount concern.

The necessity for rewrites, in the first meaning of the term, comes from the fact that the paper is on duty only about twelve hours a day. An afternoon paper figures that things happening between 4 A.M. and 4 P.M. are in its time zone and must be cared for firsthand; happenings between 4 P.M. and the next 4 A.M.

belong in the morning paper's province, and the afternoon publication will borrow them instead of covering them itself. The morning sheet, in turn, designates its news day as 4 P.M. to 4 A.M., and relies upon lifting from the afternoon paper news originating in the other twelve hours. This pilfering does not constitute larceny; it is an understood and accepted practice. Covering its own news day is hard work; to care also for the other half would be too much of an added burden, especially since the news originating in that other half would be printed first by another paper.

Such is the system in a town having both afternoon and morning papers. Where there is only an afternoon or only a morning paper, the staff has to care for the entire twenty-four hours. Even so, it saves some work by rewriting from invading papers published in other cities. Those invaders may have virtually nothing of local news for the rewriting paper, but they do have regional or trade-area material that can be lifted.

Clyde's city has both morning and afternoon publications, and Clyde is on the afternoon paper. "Doing rewrites" means that he is at the office at 6 o'clock, ahead of other staff members. His title is "sunrise editor" or "morning glory," admittedly disrespectful. "So early I have to wake up the janitor," he growls. Two copies of the morning paper await him on the city editor's desk.

#### FIVE PILES OF CLIPPINGS

He begins by clipping all the local and regional news. The nearby but out-of-town matter he dumps on the suburban editor's desk. The local news he divides into five piles:

1. The kill pile. These are stories which his paper had yesterday afternoon and have appeared in the morning paper as rewrites. They are complete and done for; nothing can happen to bring them to life again. The monthly report of the city health department, listing the number of dog-bite, whooping-cough, and chicken-pox cases, presented yesterday, has done its full duty.

2. The future book pile. These are announcements of happenings as yet unhappened. Today is the fourth, and the county optometrists' society will have its quarterly meeting on the twenty-

fourth. The city editor will record this in his book, so that when the twenty-fourth comes he will be reminded to send a reporter to the Hotel Warren to find out what the optometrists said and did.

3. The rewrite pile. Here are the stories that originated after the final edition of Clyde's paper went to press yesterday afternoon. They are news which will sprout no new developments today. Miss Anita Henty spoke last night to the Woman's Club on "Gems from Shakespeare." What she said then hasn't changed during the night; the story is safe for rewriting.

4. The filler pile. These are rewrite stories, but so trivial that each will be rewritten in a single sentence rather than in several paragraphs.

5. The follow pile. Follow stories, known as folos, are serials; they have more than one installment. Pastor Seabright told the Tuesday Evening Club that he won't let his children go to the high-school football games because they would see such widespread drinking. Obviously this doesn't end the story; it must have a folo, in the form of interviews with school officials who comment upon Mr. Seabright's accusations.

Clyde leaves on the city editor's desk all the piles except the rewrites and the fillers. These he takes to his own desk and starts rewriting. He has to hurry a little, for the rewrites are part of the early copy which feeds the composing room until today's fresh news begins to come in.

The rewrites will be seen by two groups of readers. The first group buys the morning paper, and hence already has had a chance to learn about Miss Henty's speech. The afternoon paper must give that speech an alchemy minimizing its antiquity, so that these readers will not put down the paper with a snort, "There's nothing here that wasn't in the morning paper." The second group doesn't buy the morning edition, and consequently Miss Henty's speech is brand new.

Which group to favor? Here is one place where the city editors unite in chorus: favor the readers who saw the morning paper. Some of the city editors will be wrong, because the morning papers in their towns are of such slim circulation that stories they carry are not seen by a majority of readers. Yet newspaper tradition makes so much of the "new" element that a story "old"

to even a few readers must be dipped in the vat. The alchemy of masking an old story so that it seems fresh has five steps. The rewrite must be:

1. Shorter. Yes, because the rewrites will be numerous enough to consume altogether too much space unless they are chopped. The pressure on space is so heavy that information previously seen by an appreciable body of readers must be cut as much as possible. Each office has its own policy as to how drastic this condensing should be. A common decision would be that a rewrite should not be more than half as long as the original story, and preferably should be cut even more.

2. Given a new lead. This is a bit of mesmerism, or even a shell game. It is an attempt to make the morning-paper reader follow a story he has seen already by giving its rewritten version a different emphasis. The first story had Miss Henty telling the Woman's Club that Shakespeare was the greatest of character analysts, and mentioning quite briefly that his plays were easy to produce, as they had to be because of the physical limitations of the Elizabethan stage. Clyde's rewrite puts the "easy to produce" at the start and the "character analyst" at the bottom.

3. Verified. This irks Clyde, for it means much thumbing of the city directory. The morning paper may have twisted a name or an identification. The morning paper cub wrote that "Dennis T. Dorgan was the speaker" and Clyde must find out that the name should have been "Dennis L. Dorgan." Particularly on police news and obituaries Clyde verifies names industriously.

4. Rewritten entirely rather than in part. Clyde could save time by hammering out a new lead sentence and then pasting on the rest of the morning-paper account, but this would have two drawbacks. First, it wouldn't save space, and, second, the story would be too familiar to readers who saw the morning issue. Papers don't like to have their rewrites recognized as such.

5. Better written. Certainly, for the rewrite is a twice-told tale. The original writer may have been sprinting against the clock; Clyde is supposed to have enough time to be kinder to the language.

See now the working of the system. Here is the morning-paper chronicle:

Eight minutes after the car had been reported stolen, police last night recovered the new automobile of William H. Young, 716 Pinckney Street. The speedometer showed it had been driven only one-fifth of a mile.

Mr. Young parked his car on Harrison Street, between Main and Dwight, while he went into a store. That was about 7:30. When he came out at 7:45, the car was gone. Returning to the store, he telephoned the police who radioed the information to all the cruiser cars.

At 7:53, Patrolman Walter Ralph and Patrick Burke, cruising on Dwight Street, spotted Mr. Young's car, parked, they said, too close to a hydrant. Burke drove it to the station, getting there before Mr. Young did.

"That's service," said Mr. Young as he drove away. "Next time I won't leave the keys in the car."

The car had been driven only 149.2 miles when it was stolen and 149.4 when it was recovered.

Clyde scans the story for a new lead. Both the eight-minutes and the two-tenths of a mile aspects have been played, so he drops down to Mr. Young's quotes for his new angle. He devises this rewrite:

"That's service," said William H. Young, 716 Pinckney Street, when the police recovered his stolen car last night only eight minutes after he reported its theft. He had parked his new car on Harrison Street while he went into a store. A cruiser car found it around the corner on Dwight Street. The before-the-theft mileage was 149.2 and the mileage when recovered was 149.4.

Sometimes Clyde has to wriggle to find a new angle because the original story had the only possible strong lead. Dropping far down for a new angle vexes Clyde, who has a good argument that the natural lead, reworded, is better than a weak but different angle. City editors usually don't see it that way, however, so Clyde follows the convention. Often, however, he can get a new start without diving too deeply into the story. Here is the morning-paper lead:

Three objectives for the coming year were adopted by the Sixteen Acres Civic League meeting last night at Pulaski Hall on Embury Street. They are:



To have Franklin Street paved, to get better bus service, and to obtain a branch of the city library.

Franklin Street is. . . .

Something from the second paragraph, or secondary lead, of the original story will give Clyde a new angle. Thus:

Better bus service was one of three objectives for the year, adopted by the Sixteen Acres Civic League at its meeting last night at Pulaski Hall. The others are obtaining a branch of the city library, and paving Franklin Street.

Rewrites are the best possible Keeley cure for a verbose reporter. Presenting all essential information in half the original space demands unflagging attention to word economy. Two weeks of rewrites will teach Clyde more about writing tight than will anything else the city editor might give him.

### THE FOLO STORY

His rewrites done, Clyde waits the city editor's arrival. The executive glances through the folo pile and hands Clyde three clippings. "Go after these," he commands. This may be an ordinary assignment, or it may be a reform-school practice. Perhaps Clyde has been giving up too easily, and saying casually, "No story, boss." The city editor sees that a dose of folos is indicated. The therapeutics are simple. The editor gives Clyde a fair-to-middling story and orders, "follow it," meaning, of course, "Dig up something new about this." The story announces that Maddocks and Harron have been issued a building permit for \$4,500 alterations at the business block at 212 Main Street, and tells how the front of the two-story building will have its face lifted to make a fifty-year-old structure look as if it had been built only this morning. Clyde grins and drops in at the Maddocks and Harron office to get the names of the various contractors who will do the work.

Next day the city editor hands him his yesterday clipping and says sweetly, "Follow this again. You haven't pumped it dry." Again Clyde grins, but a bit wanly. What is left to say about the remodeling of 212 Main Street? He whirls his wits and decides to find out how many other buildings on Main Street have

been modernized. A tour of the street and a chat with the building commissioner give him his material. "Now," he gloats, "we have heard the last of No. 212 for a while."

Not so, for next day the city editor says, "This is getting interesting. Follow it again." Clyde attempts no grin. All he can think of is to go to Maddocks and Harron and find out what will be done to the interior as well as to the exterior of the building. "Hmph," the city editor comments. "Not very lively." Next day he murmurs, "Better follow this once more. There should be more in this than what we've had." Clyde starts to ask, "Well, such as?" but the telephone rings and the city editor turns to answer it. Clyde forlornly visits the architect who planned the remodeling and comes back with a story about the widespread use of colored glass in modernizing buildings.

The next morning he tries to duck out the moment he turns in the rewrites but the city editor is too fast for him. "Take another try at this building story, Clyde." Red mutiny surges through Clyde but he remembers that his car needs new piston rings and decides this is no time to be fired for insubordination. Dismally he prowls through the local history and discovers that this is not the first but the third time that 212 Main Street has been remodeled.

Four days more this goes on before the city editor is satisfied that No. 212 has been amply chronicled. "When you dig hard, you find the stuff," he tells Clyde. Clyde catches on; no more half-covered stories, unless he is ready to pay for them with a siege of heartlessly prolonged folos.

The folo story invokes a psychology that exposes the rattle-brained reporter. Enthusiastic about the new, first-day account, this writer flatters himself that the story has been developed so completely that nothing remains to be said. Told to unearth a folo, he listlessly turns in two paragraphs, lusty evidence of mental laziness. Except for disciplinary purposes, the city editor won't ask for a folo unless the story really is alive, for always he has more copy than he can use comfortably. He will drop a story quickly enough once it is truly finished.

## PAYING BACK THE OPPOSITION

In a town with rival newspapers, the folo is Clyde's most promising way of avenging a scooping. The other paper's reporter made him miserable yesterday with a page 1 exclusive, and today that other reporter is gloating and chesty. He doesn't bother to follow vigorously the story he originated yesterday, and Clyde pays him back with a rattling good second-day story. Clyde, in turn, must remember when he has done the scooping that the other fellow, smarting from the city editor's rebuke, will try to even the score with a lively folo.

The folo is merely pumping new information into an old story. This new information falls into various classifications:

1. An entirely new aspect, so that the story automatically remains alive. The first-day relation announced that the Patton & Morse factory has added 200 employees. Chasing a folo, Clyde learns from the superintendent that the company has just received a government order that assures full-time operation for six months.

2. The consequence or result of the original action. The first story said "Three persons were injured when two automobiles collided." The folo next day recounts the death of one of the injured.

3. Relation to previous events. The original story was "two cars collide" and the folo explains that the accident resulted in the fourth traffic fatality this year on "slaughterhouse road."

4. Reaction to the first story. This folo demands interviews with persons whose views were not given, or were not given completely, in the first story. The opening account told of the threat of a company's employees to strike unless the management granted concessions. The folo will give the management's version.

5. Local ends to stories originating out of town. A patient died at a distant hospital because the electric lights went out while the surgeon was in the middle of the operation. The local folo consists of asking officials whether the same thing could happen here, and why not.

6. The same old story, but with more details. The original

story made four inches of type and told of two canoeists being rescued after clinging all night to their capsized craft. Obviously four inches aren't enough for all the details. An account of how the canoeists felt as the night wore on and their faces grew raw from incessant slapping of the waves will make interesting reading.

7. The same old story, but written from a different angle, perhaps as a color story. The freight train engineer jammed on the brakes when he saw a shaggy dog on the track and the sudden stop sprawled six cars in the ditch. The first-day story is complete, and written as straight news. The folo may present the action from the dog's point of view.

8. The installment story. Clyde learns exclusively that the Hotel Warren will build a fifty-room addition. He gets the information from the manager, the only official who has the authority to release it, and the manager leaves tonight for three days in Philadelphia. The opposition paper won't be able to reach him. Clyde splits the story into chunks. The first day he announces that the addition will be built, and the second day he presents further details, thereby giving him two scoops. Naturally Clyde doesn't do this unless he knows that his story is exclusive and will stay that way.

#### TYING-IN WITH YESTERDAY

The folo always must have a tie-in to the first story, for the benefit of readers who did not see the original chronicle. This tie-in must present the essential facts so that the folo will be completely understandable. If the story remains alive several days, the tie-in becomes shorter and shorter, since the chances decrease daily that a reader has missed all the preceding accounts. If the tie-in is brief, it can be worked into the lead; if it is long, run it as the second paragraph. The first example shows a brief tie-in and the second a full-paragraph link with the past:

Gasoline prices went down again today, with the first grade product selling for 15 cents, ethyl for 17, and the third grade for 13, as the price war, *begun yesterday when the Gold and Black Refining Company dropped all its prices three cents*, spread to all the major companies.

The first break in the gasoline price war came this morning when the Grey and Green Company increased its prices two cents. Before noon the Red and White stations had followed but the other major companies were continuing at yesterday's level, which had regular gasoline selling at 15 cents, ethyl at 17, and third-grade at 13.

*The price cutting began Saturday when the Black and Gold clipped three cents from its charges. All the other companies met its prices by Sunday and since then two other reductions, each of one cent, were made.*

Today's prices were. . . .

When a story stays alive several days, Clyde tries to find more than one source of information. Doing so avoids quoting the same person incessantly, and usually results in more complete stories because the one person probably knows only part of the information.

If the sources are few, Clyde sometimes conceals them from the rival paper by such a masking as "a well informed source declared." This may prevent the other paper from finding out where the news is coming from, but it cannot be counted on. The rival reporter may be a good ferret. Moreover, the city editor dislikes the infectiousness of "reliable sources" and restricts the device to genuinely biggish stories, so that Clyde will not overuse this handy practice and substitute his own guessings and interpretations for more arduous fact-gathering.

Edition protection must be considered in a town with competing papers. Clyde gets an exclusive on a story of city interest but forgets to warn the make-up editor, who puts the story on page 1 of the first or up-country edition. The other paper sees that early edition and steals the story for its city edition, thus making Clyde's scoop dismayingly nugatory. Next time Clyde marks the scoop "City Edition Only."

Occasionally a paper is scooped with its own scoop. The Robert Ripley happening comes in this fashion:

The story deals with a suburbanite from a first-edition town, who gets into an accident in the city, which is third edition. The story is tagged "First Edition Sure." Space is tight that day, so the make-up editor lifts the story after the first edition and fills

its space on the second edition with news of more interest in the territory invaded by that second edition. He plans to restore the story on the third edition, but the news gangs him and he has so many details to think about and so many pages to rebuild for the third edition that he forgets that little yarn taken out of the first edition. The rival paper, however, saw the first edition and pilfered the story for its third edition. The original paper is scooped on the third edition because of the failure to restore the story. It doesn't happen often, but when it does several vocabularies become suddenly acidulated.

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## 30

### COLOR STORIES

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#### FROM ORION TO THE CROSS

#### UNITED PRESS LIKED THIS STORY:

San Francisco, Cal.—(UP)—Miss Babe Scott stepped up to the city editor yesterday and handed him a poem which she said her brother had written.

She thought it was good, and she wanted to know if the paper might print it. She explained to the city editor that her brother's name was Witham Scott, that he was 25, a private in the army air corps, and stationed at Riverside, California.

The city editor looked at the poem:

"When the last, long flight is over and the happy landing's past,  
"And my altimeter tells me the crackup's come at last—  
"I'll point her nose to the ceiling and I'll give my crate the gun.  
"I'll open her up and let her zoom to the airport of the sun.  
"Then I'll meet my fellow pilots, no longer flying low,  
"As I stow my crate in the hanger, on the field where fliers go.  
"Then we'll fly forever with the Almighty Flying Boss  
"And ride all heaven's airways from Orion to the Cross."

The city editor looked up from the paper at Miss Scott. She was smiling.

"It's a good thing that I don't believe in premonitions," she said.

"It's a good poem; we'll print it," the city editor said.

Miss Scott left. The city editor didn't tell her that an hour before he had learned that Witham Scott, 25, had been killed when an Army plane crashed into Lick observatory on Mount Hamilton.

United Press liked the story well enough to send it all the way across the continent. Editors thousands of miles from California put it on page 1 with double-column headlines.

The ghost of Henry Justin Smith, the city editor who helped so powerfully to give the *Chicago Daily News* its still-cherished reputation for effective stories, repeats the dictum that Mr. Smith for years pounded into his reporters: it's the way it's written. And only a few months ago the *C.D.N.*, in a full-page advertisement in *Editor & Publisher*, announced itself as a good advertising medium, not because it sells more than 400,000 copies a day, but because so many of its staff members are such good writers that they are authors of a veritable five-foot shelf of books.

"Journalism must be very interesting, because a reporter meets such interesting people, but newspaper writing is completely routine." This misjudgment has been common ever since newspapers began, and it is as rickety now as it was a century ago. Much news writing is "organized" or done according to a "standard form," but an inviting amount of it is as free as the four winds. These individual writings, or color stories, are the reporter's playground. Here he devises new methods and procedures, modifies or rejects as many rules as he wishes, writes entirely as he pleases.

If he can "do color," he puts a good market price on himself, because only a good reporter can handle these stories. A city editor is grateful for one reporter who can "do color" on order; if he has two who can, he knows that heaven on earth is a reality. Some city editors have no one who can play with color; they must brighten the paper with scintillations from Associated or United Press.

### COLOR NEWS IS WORTHY

Two misconceptions need removing. The first is that a color story is trivial. The event it recounts may be slim, but the story makes a powerful impact upon readers. This is entirely fitting, for life is composed quite as much of little, hard-hitting happenings as it is of world-encircling reverberations. A newspaper with nothing but substantial and significant news is a cracked mirror of life; it short-weights its readers on human and personal values. The second misconception is that color writing is a substitute for reporting. "I don't want to wear out my shoes chasing information; I want to sling words." Chasing informa-



tion is the only way to get to know people well enough to obtain color stories. The young hopeful who sees himself sitting all day in the office and writing magical sentences overlooks one point: where will he find subjects for those magical sentences unless he wears out shoe leather in herding information and meeting people?

Even the bleakest reporter has in him an occasional color story, but to be able to do color on demand requires both an intimate acquaintance with people and a craftsmanship with words. Because color stories are so individual, some youngsters say, "There aren't any rules. You just write." There are no steel-jacketed rules but there are preferred procedures. The three principal procedures are:

1. Every word must contribute to the effect or impact the reporter wishes the story to make. Surely, for these stories build upon an emotional appeal. The fact itself is a sliver compared to the lead-story news; the power comes from "the way it's written."

2. Understatement usually is more effective than overstatement. The clever hostess never gives her dinner guests all the food they want. If she did, they would overeat, would waddle from the table, and furtively swallow sodamints. She sends them away wishing they had "just a little bit more of that gorgeous pie." Americans resist tampering with their emotions; they dislike being told to laugh or weep. The more the story tries to compel them to chuckle or cry, the more stubbornly they balk. When an incident is presented so neatly that they themselves "complete" it by making it stronger than did the reporter, they have accepted that story.

3. Use the devices with which fiction writers obtain their effects. The short-story experts are doing exactly what the reporter is doing, and various of their methods can be transferred bodily to newspaper writing.

To the reporter aflame to make a name for himself by color writing, this warning: a color story is a hundred per cent, or it is zero. It has no half-way point. Ergo, be not too quick to turn every item into color. If only one of ten clicks, the city editor will say, "Better stick to straight news, Brad. You don't do so well with color." Color now and then, infrequently enough so

that each story is a crackerjack, builds a stronger reputation than scores of stories, most of them bad. Quality counts far more than quantity in color writing.

#### NARRATIVE PROCEDURES

Four of the devices of narrative fiction help the color writer:

1. Keep the cast of characters small, with one person or one small group of persons perpetually in the forefront. Note that in the UP story, only Miss Scott and the city editor were mentioned, for all that the newspaper office contained a dozen or a score of busy, active persons. Since color stories usually are short, often having fewer than 300 words, readers don't have time enough before the story is done to become acquainted with a large cast of characters. It would have been easy enough in the final paragraph to say, "The city editor didn't tell her that only an hour before the telegraph editor, a chunky fellow with a cold pipe clamped in one corner of his mouth, had passed him a bulletin saying that Witham Scott, 25, had been killed when. . . ." Readers then would have had to become acquainted with the telegraph editor, and to keep him sorted out from the other characters. The telegraph editor doesn't need to come into the story at all; he is merely a bit of machinery whereby the city editor learns that Witham Scott has been killed. To avoid confusing readers by introducing a new and minor character, the reporter dropped that character entirely and wrote, "The city editor didn't tell her that an hour before he had learned that Witham Scott, 25, had been killed. . . ."

2. Use a rather jerky or impressionistic style. Staccato writing indicates action and motion, but one touch of the listless is enough to dilute the story's emotional impact. Quick-movement keeps a reader's attention at the peak, because he sees that each word counts and he must notice every phrase or miss something of importance.

From this, the reporter builds a dictum: when a color story limps, cut away its corns by trimming it to two thirds or a half its original space. Minor details pared away, the action probably will be intensified so much that the story is twice as powerful.

3. Subordinate everything to the one mood the story hopes to

arouse. If a story aims to provoke laughter, keep it clear of any mournfulnesses, else the one bit of melancholy sticks up like a bump in a cement road and the story will be ended before readers are again in a laughing frame of mind. Mixing the emotions kills many a color story; only long, long screeds can switch from one emotion to another and back again.

4. Split the story into episodes, as a stage play is divided into acts. This bunches the action which otherwise would be diffused. Notice that the UP story put everything into one scene, the meeting of Miss Scott and the city editor. Miss Scott's entering and leaving the office were not mentioned. What the city editor said when she had gone was omitted. Thus there were no secondary actions to cut away the impact made by the central event.

Within this one scene, each element was given completely. There were no flashbacks. For example, Witham Scott was identified or described fully the first time he was mentioned. Thus readers knew him at once; they did not have to carry in mind a half-done identification which would be completed later. Telling each bit completely, whether it requires many lines or few, is one of the greatest helps to clarity and to forcefulness.

A color story need not be restricted as this one was to a single episode, but to give it more than two or three is risky because the story is so short that the quick change from one scene to another will be confusing.

Pulling the story into a very few episodes increases its rapidity, because it slices away all nonessential elements. Quite possibly the telephone rang while the city editor was reading the poem, or the news editor shouted over from his desk, "Jack, when will that Elks picture be ready?" These things happened, but they did not contribute to the episode and hence out they went.

When Miss Scott first spoke to the city editor she probably told him that both she and her brother liked the paper, and had read it for years. The city editor smiled a gracious reply. But this dialog was omitted, because it didn't advance the situation. The episode was told "full length," but at no excess length. Everything that could be spared was cut out. In many color stories, this deletion of secondary detail is the device that prevents soggy. "If the story can get along without it, delete it."

The reporter's first question when he wonders whether an incident is good for color will be, "Is it a proper subject?" Newspaper readers know little or nothing of typography, but they recognize a color story from its headline, unmistakably different from the head for straight news. "Aha, here's one of those weep-or-smile bits." If the story lurking under that compelling headline fails, the reader is more than disappointed; he is resentful. He was "lured" to the story by a headline suggesting that here was information very different from anything else on the page, but he found the story weak and listless. He's peeved.

#### VERIFY THE SUBJECT MATTER

The subject may be inappropriate in several ways. First, the happening may be so trifling that it has no engaging aspect. Phrasings cannot create an interesting event; all they can do is to intensify it. George Bishop is about to take the family on a Sunday picnic, but the car has a flat tire and the departure is delayed half an hour while George puts on the spare and then scrubs the grime off his hands. The most limber vocabulary cannot make color out of this situation; the event is too thin to be emotional, one way or the other.

If, however, that thirty-minute tardiness has some melancholy or some humorous sequel, then color writing is in order because the event, itself trivial, led to something with strong emotional content. Because of that delay, the Bishops were still at home when the overhot attic generated spontaneous combustion; someone smelled the smoke, and the firemen were called while the blaze was still tiny enough to be put out easily. Here is an "all's well that ends well" color item, still somewhat on the diluted side yet strong enough that skillful telling can produce a good little yarn.

Second in the series of inappropriate subjects is the happening of deceiving pathos. On first inspection its throat seems choked with sobs, but closer scrutiny shows that the melancholy isn't real. The Bishop pup is missing, the Bishop youngsters are damp-cheeked with tears, and it looks as if a child-grieving-for-dog story was upcoming. About 9 at night the pup returns, bedraggled; he had gone to the lake in the nearby park and became so engrossed in aquatics that he lingered. The Bishops

meantime had telephoned the police and the S. P. C. A. and were nearing the frantic. Unless some bit of detail is absorbing, this episode cannot be played for tears. It is only an "almost," and Anglo-Saxons won't wear long faces for a tragedy that didn't materialize.

A too-enthusiastic color writer would go ahead on this story, hoping that dexterity with words would salvage the ailing incident. To do so is to rival the leaden-footed batter who tries to stretch a Texas-league single into a double. He is thrown out by a three-yard margin. The color story is thrown out just as disastrously. Almost pathos is no pathos at all.

Third place on the don't-do-it list goes to the episode that appears to be humorous but contains a vein of sorrow that snuffs out the humor. Teddy Bishop, aged six, finds a half-dollar and goes on a spending spree. He depletes the lollipop supply of every store in the neighborhood, with the inevitable result: castor oil. His adventures very well might make a bright little chronicle, until the story tells that the youngster came down that evening with appendicitis, induced in part by the castor oil, and was hurried to the hospital for an emergency operation.

"What of it?" objects a young reporter. "Appendicitis operations aren't any more serious than a cut finger. They used to be dangerous, but not any more." They are potentially perilous, even today, and for all that this one may be eminently successful, the worry the family undergoes and the unexpected expense are too real to permit the story to be treated with levity. The young reporter who hasn't yet experienced the pangs of parenthood sees the humorous beginning as outweighing the sorry conclusion, but every father and every mother who reads the story will appreciate keenly that to the Bishops the episode was completely unfortunate, and will resent so serious an incident being treated jestingly. No situation that brings sorrow or pain to a character, human or animal, is a fit subject for humor.

The fourth and final dangerous topic is the one that leaves a bad taste in the mouth if it isn't handled expertly. Invasion of family privacy is an example. Dick, who left home six years ago to make his fortune, comes home in a coffin. The G-men had to shoot when he resisted arrest as a racketeer. His father goes to

the railroad station to arrange for the coffin to be taken to a funeral parlor. A reporter clumsily overwrites the railroad-station scene:

The old man stood there, a silent symbol of the heartbreak that comes when one of life's greatest ideals is dragged down into the dust. His shoulders drooped and his chin quavered, as he attempted to hold back the warm, round tears that chased one another down his wrinkled cheeks.

Ugh. Tears "chased one another" as if they were playing hide and seek. The picture is so bungled that it repels readers. Instead of saying, "That poor old fellow," they will complain, "Why couldn't that fresh reporter leave him alone when he was going through the hardest moment of his life?" Yet this episode was perfectly proper for color writing, if that writing was good enough. If the reporter can't tell his story in color, he puts it into straight-news form. That may rob it of some of its emotional strength, but it avoids stirring reader hostility.

Many a color story that fails can be rescued by amending a few words. A single misfit word or phrase can destroy the entire story:

The crowd screeched with delight as McCarthy rounded third, then roared its applause as he crossed the plate to tie the score. From every section of grandstand and bleachers came the *chirps* of the half-delirious fans.

A roar is a hearty, deep-throated noise that rolls along like the surf; a chirp is a thin, squeaky noise as if a door hinge needed oil. That one wrong word pulls down any impression created by the rest of the writing.

The color story is no place for recondite and auricular phrasings. The writing must be of immediate and easy comprehension; a baffled reader must give so much attention to translating the strange words that he cannot concentrate upon the story's dramatic quality:

Heber Morse is a victim today of the *ternary* blues.

In other words, Heber had three bits of misfortune in quick succession. Many readers have never met "ternary" before;

whether they will stay with the story long enough to sleuth a definition for the unfamiliar word is highly dubious.

When a second-rater resolves to become a color writer he resorts to alliteration. It is a "garlic" device; excellent, but a little of it is plenty. The second-rater isn't satisfied to swab the frying pan with alliterative garlic; he tosses a whole handful of the seasoning into his hash and then wonders why it has a strange taste:

Drooping dahlias, discouraged daisies, and disconsolate daffodils. . . .

A little alliteration is natural enough to be emphatic; more than a little is forced, strained, and ineffective.

### STRUCTURAL NECESSITIES

The compact color story has certain structural requirements; if they cannot be satisfied the chances are slim that the story will be effective. The requirements are four:

1. The subject must be an incident, an event, a happening—some action must take place. This rules out the purely descriptive writing. To describe yesterday's sunset calls for skillful wording, but description without action is unsatisfying; readers simply won't accept it. J. Fenimore Cooper wrote some of the grandest action stories that any country can boast, but few persons read them today, simply because the descriptive passages are so long that the action passages are buried and hard to find.

2. The incident should contain conversation or dialog, because quote marks make a story much more lifelike and real. A story in which things are said is twice as "human" as one without talking. Even an episode mainly about animals rather than persons generally can offer dialog. Dialog has a second strength; it breaks the story into short paragraphs, easier to read and much more inviting optically than long masses of grey.

3. The episode must have a central character, more prominent than anyone else in the cast. The color story is so short that readers have no time to become well acquainted with more than one character.

4. The episode must be true. Long years ago when newspapers were experimenting with color stories, many reporters believed that inventing details to strengthen an otherwise limping action was allowable. Today it isn't. Some readers, often an appreciable number, are familiar with the episode and will spot the inventions. Then they tell their friends how much fabrication the story contained, and the newspaper is branded widely as a liar. Further, inventing details has a marijuana effect; it becomes a habit. At first the reporter invented one dinky little bit. A week later, rushed with work, he saved some time by inventing two details. Before long he finds himself perpetually too busy to go out and learn the facts; he gets one fact out of six and imagines the other five. Just as inevitably as February brings snow, a story backfires, the city editor asks "How come?" and there is a vacancy on the staff.

The third requirement, that the story have a central figure, gives the reporter a hint that will rescue many a piece of copy. The story droops. When he inspects it, he finds that in the first half Motorist Johnson, who couldn't see the stop sign, has all the prominence, and in the second half Policeman Mulcahey hogs the attention. The story is either that of what Mr. Johnson said to Officer Mulcahey, with Johnson more prominent throughout than Mulcahey, or it is of what Mulcahey said to Johnson, with Mulcahey always dominant. To divide the prominence and present each character with equal strength ruins the story. The reporter rewrites so that one or another of the characters is throughout in the top prominence.

#### GOOD REPORTING IS NECESSARY

"All very well," someone says, "but where do I find the episodes for these little color stories with which to impress the city editor?" They are by-products of good reporting. The reporter who covers his stories thoroughly runs into an endless stream of tidbits. If he keeps his eyes and ears open as he goes from one assignment to another, he finds still more. Ability to do color is partly a matter of superlative writing and partly of superlative observing.

Ben is walking down Front Street, past the railroad yards. A locomotive whistles in shrill anguish. "Why?" Ben asks himself,



"Why should an engine toot for five minutes, and still be tooting?" Ben investigates. Yes, the whistle jammed and even the round-house foreman couldn't quiet it. Every eardrum in the vicinity is ready to crack when a section hand, who should know nothing of locomotives, comes along.

"Betcha I can turn that thing off," he boasts.

"Gwan, before somebody slams you one."

"Betcha I can," and he holds up a dollar bill. "Who's got even money that says I can't?"

Someone has. The section hand climbs atop the boiler and begins monkeying. The whistle drops into a gasp, a sob, and silence. "Gimme your dollar, mister."

And Ben has a color story. Several hundred persons heard the whistling and were annoyed by it. Only Ben investigated, and only Ben can write the story.

When the city editor needs a brightener to rub away the curse of too much serious but uninteresting news, he tells Ben, "Write us some color." Because he is a color specialist, Ben knows where to find such stories in a hurry, or he may prefer to inspect some of the shorter straight news the other reporters have just written and to revise a story into color.

Where does he travel when he searches for color? He goes to the places where people congregate, and where they are likely to be a little out of their routine. The railroad station is always a good stopping place. The way people welcome or say good-bye to friends and relatives is likely to be colorful. A redcap staggers for the 9:22, trying to keep seven bags, suitcases, and valises from slipping out of his grasp. The woman who follows him carries a Gladstone bag and two parcels. "She must be going around the world," Ben muses. When the porter returns, still out of breath, Ben questions him. Seven bags, and they weighed a ton. A ten-cent tip. The woman was going to Holmesburg, nine miles distant, on a round-trip ticket, with a one-day time limit. There's Ben's story.

Ben takes a ride on trolley car or bus. Something will happen or something will be said before he has ridden twenty minutes that will make a story. The bus driver stops at Orchard Street, though no one wishes to alight and no prospective passenger is in

sight. After a moment's wait, the driver shoves the bus into gear. He seems a bit puzzled. Near the end of the line, when the bus is nearly empty and the driver can relax a little, Ben works him into conversation. He always stops at Orchard Street on that particular trip; every day an elderly man gets on and rides to the end of the route. There, while the driver changes the destination sign and clears the fare-register, his passenger explains what the war is all about. The driver knows it by heart now. Then the passenger announces that he will walk home, to get his daily exercise. "First day he's slipped up in a month," the driver says. Ben can make that into a color story.

The city clerk's office, where marriage licenses are obtained, is crammed with color. So are hotel lobbies. Likewise buildings with elevators. Ben has a dozen places where half an hour of watchful waiting will yield a story.

Equally important, he knows hundreds of persons, and has trained those who come into frequent contact with the public to pass on to him little incidents they have noticed. Flora, the newsstand girl at the Hotel Warren, is one of Ben's helpers.

"Hello, Flora. Anybody ask you to change a \$100 bill today?"

"Hello, Ben. No; I haven't seen anything larger than a quarter for a week. But there was an old fellow yesterday who. . ."

Back at the office, the cub inquires, "How do you get all these freak stories, Ben?"

"Oh, you keep your eyes open, you know a lot of people, and stories just come."

Yes, and also Ben is a highly qualified writer, a specialist reporter, one of the men the city editor couldn't replace in a hurry.

#### OTHER FEATURE STORIES

Many offices lack a definition of "color," "human interest," and "feature." A "feature" story is a seminews writing, recognizable by the fact that it is as printable on Friday as on Tuesday. The account of the election of a new worshipful master of Mt. Adams lodge of Masons must be printed at once, for it is "news." An interview with the new worshipful master, in which he tells of his seven years in Australia and recounts that his father and both his grandfathers had been masters of this same lodge, can run almost

any time within a fortnight after the election, for it is a "feature."

A feature may be a short story or a long one. As used here, a color story is a short feature. Some city editors would call it a human interest story; others would label it merely a feature. Whatever the terminology, the meaning is the same: a brief episodic bit, in which "the way it's written" rather than the happening itself provides the gleam and sparkle.

The long feature often grows out of some news event; it is a background or an explanatory story. The city council votes \$6,000 to overhaul the fire alarm system. A feature story to run a day, a week, or a fortnight later, gives only one or two sentences to saying that \$6,000 has been appropriated; it spends almost all its space explaining what the alarm system is, how it works, what can go wrong with it, why repairs are needed, who will make them, and how.

A reporter who can provide a steady stream of these longer feature stories increases his market price, for he has a specialty in which the less ambitious staff members will not challenge him.

Writing the long feature is largely a matter of: (1) gathering information; (2) organizing this information so that it is easy to follow and a pleasure to read.

Finding subjects for features demands nothing more than alertness. Almost every issue of the newspaper contains, in the straight-news accounts, suggestions for several feature stories. The "Daily Fire Record," a skeletonized tabulation of the fire calls between yesterday noon and this noon, lists two chimney fires and one call for "burning bed clothes." A feature-hunting reporter interviews the fire chief about freak or unusual blazes. Within a few days the city will have another fire slightly out of the ordinary, which can be used as a news peg on which to hang the feature interview with the chief.

A brief story on the suburban page announces that dogs in a nearby county have been ordered restrained for ninety days to check a threatened rabies outbreak. This item makes a good news peg for a local feature, built upon interviews with the city health officer and with several veterinarians about the precautions dog owners should take to protect their pets.

The weekly report of the building commissioner lists a permit

given to raze an old building. From the newspaper's files and from a talk with the curator of the local historical society, the reporter exhumes an interesting history of that old building. Another entry in the commissioner's report provides a second feature story. An aging structure is to be modernized. The reporter finds out from the commissioner how much money has been invested in the past decade in remodeling old buildings that otherwise probably would have been replaced. The sum so invested well may be surprisingly large, and an account telling how a structure is converted from Victorian drabness will be interesting.

Thus even statistics, normally soporific, can grow into features. The calendar suggests an unending series of "annual stories." Announcement of the plans for the July Fourth celebration prompts a feature built upon quick research in the files to learn how the day was observed half a century ago. The resultant contrast story will be of easy reading. Again, the calendar proclaims "Constitution Day" as coming next Thursday, and a reporter forges an interesting feature about this and other neglected anniversaries, with quotes from the mayor and the school officials about why the city pays so little heed to the day.

Striking events, either within or beyond the city, become the basis of other feature stories. A school boiler explodes in a city 1,100 miles away and kills sixty children. The story rides high on page 1. School and fire department officials will be eager to explain what precautions are taken to prevent such a tragedy locally. Again, the eight-inch snow received a streamer headline and the story under it recounted that railroad trains were only half an hour behind schedule, though other transportation almost ceased. The railroads have an extensive and costly system of keeping the tracks open. Explaining that system provides a feature story.

The news need not be cataclysmic in order to foster a feature story. The women's page proclaims new styles in footwear. A chiropodist will tell how the changes in fashions influence the foot ailments he treats.

Out-of-town papers contain features that the local reporter can duplicate. The *Capital City Gazette* has a story about an untiring man for whom life began at eighty. The local reporter can

## COLOR STORIES

orrow this hint and develop a series of stories about residents of his city who are interestingly busy despite having passed the age at which most persons believe it is time to retire. This series, by the way, will be embarrassingly long, for the reporter's research will locate a surprising number of interesting oldsters.

If he keeps his eyes open, the reporter sees many subjects for features. The national guard company seems surprisingly juvenile as it parades on July Fourth. An interview with the commanding officer will develop a feature on the difference between the average age, education, and social status of today's militiaman and the guardsman of twenty-five years ago. Driving home very late some night, the reporter notices how many restaurants and how few filling stations are open. He has the hint for two feature stories, one on what merchandise can and what cannot be bought after 10 P.M., and another on the number of persons who do their work at night. Each story may have surprising information. The first may tell how to get a prescription for medicine filled at 2:30 A.M., and the second may show that the railroad has twice as many men at work in the night as in the day.

Developing contacts brings many features. The more persons, of every sort, he knows, the more hints and tips the reporter will receive. These friendly informants become increasingly communicative as they see the hints they provide transmuted into feature stories. Theirs is the pleasure of saying, "Why, the reporter never would have known about that if I hadn't told him."

These foregoing paragraphs are in no wise intended to be a complete list of feature-story sources; they are typical suggestions, aimed to show how simple is the work of finding subjects. Anyone who is news-curious enough to be a good reporter can find more feature subjects than he will have time to develop into stories.

Exactly as the city editor has a future book, so should the feature-story specialist have a ledger in which to record suggestions. On a sweltering July day, the reporter, thumbing an old magazine in the dentist's office, notices a picture of an iceboat. Humph; there are four or five iceboats every winter on Lake Darien. A good feature could be developed on how the skippers prepare their iceboats for a new season. Of course, the story isn't

ripe now, but next December it will be timely. The reporter tells himself to remember the iceboat story when winter arrives. He may very easily forget the story. But if he has his own future book and records the topic, he will be reminded of it when cold weather comes.

Writing the feature story often is largely a matter of presenting "background." The feature is an outgrowth of a straight-news chronicle, which, probably, dealt ninety per cent with today's event and only ten per cent with its ramifications, its history, and its sidelights.

The railroad discontinues No. 42, a train sixty years in service, and the news story makes one paragraph. That one paragraph cannot recount that No. 42 was once the fastest train on the line, that it was involved in the worst wreck in the division's history, that it was the train on which Governor Channing commuted every Monday morning from his home city to the capital city, that it was the train on which the railroad made its first and hesitant experiment with an oil-burning locomotive. All this information is background, historical, sidelight. It will be highly readable on the day that No. 42 makes the final trip.

The feature, then, is an "amplification" of the news. Young reporters sometimes attempt this amplifying on the basis of tricks with words. A feature forged in this manner isn't of honest metal; it is soft at the core. Good reporting, that is, information gathering, is as necessary for a feature as for a straight-news story. To view features as an "escape" from reporting is to beckon to failure.

An imperative in the feature story is a tie-in with the news peg which makes the feature timely. To write three quarters of a column about train No. 42 is useless unless the top of the story contains a statement why No. 42 at this particular time is interesting. This tie-in may be only a few words, or it may run to a paragraph or more. In the case of No. 42, it might be as brief as, "which will be discontinued Sunday after sixty years of operation."

The style of the feature is essentially that of the news story, with emphasis at the top rather than at the bottom of the paragraph.

The news story is likely to have a one-paragraph lead; the feature may have a several-paragraph introduction. If a news lead is used, it very well may be of the snapper variety, followed by a five-*W* statement:

George Lane got out of debt by paying the same bill twice.

The reputation for honesty that he established with a wholesaler by the double payment started a series of developments—"breaks," Mr. Lane terms them—that carried him from an impoverished storekeeper to one of the city's most successful merchants. Mr. Lane, who retires next week as head of the Lane Furniture Company, today outlined his business career, which covers 37 years. The career began with Mr. Lane a clerk in the small Dunham and Cutler dry goods store at 127 Monroe Street and will end with Mr. Lane as sole owner and active proprietor of a business occupying its own three-story building, 520-534 Main Street.

The feature may begin with stage-setting, history, or "mood writing." The essential requirements are that the feature begin in an interesting fashion and that it come quickly to the news peg. Other than meeting these demands, the reporter has complete freedom to try whatever "literary craftsmanship" he may wish. Because it is not straight news, the feature need not follow standard news story form unless the reporter wishes it to. The copy editor will give the feature a distinctive headline and the make-up editor will exempt it from the last-moment abbreviating he may inflict upon straight news. In every way it will be proclaimed as "different"; if he wishes it to be "different" also in manner of writing, the reporter is at liberty to gratify that wish.

As in the short color story, the devices of fiction are desirable also in the feature.

Structure is dependent entirely upon the demands of coherence. Information is arranged in blocks, so that an aspect of a topic is treated completely in one section of the story instead of being diffused in several sections. An important exception is that a mood-provoking, or "theme song," bit may be used recurrently in order to keep the feature throughout at the same pitch or intensity. Where the news story tapers at the end, the feature may close with a snapper as powerful as the wording in the lead.

Examine now a feature story, by Miss Elizabeth A. Zevnik,

University of Wisconsin School of Journalism student, and printed in the *Wisconsin State Journal*. This story was selected because it illustrates:

1. Freshness in expression.
2. Careful structure, with no overlapping of facets or aspects except the "theme song" refrain.
3. An abundance of factual material.

It was the night of September 10.

The newspapers had said "Canada Will Join Britain in War."

Blond, blue-eyed John McSherry, son of Mr. and Mrs. Eugene McSherry, Pheasant Branch tavern owners, read the papers carefully that night.

(An unusual beginning: news peg implied rather than stated outright, and comes at the very start rather than the middle or bottom of the introduction.

(Good psychology: reader "knows what's coming next," and has feeling of being "on the inside.")

War . . . excitement . . . adventure. They all loomed large before tall, mature-looking John, who still lacked 41 days of being 16 years old.

Suddenly he made up his mind.

"Mother and dad," he said, "I'm going to Canada to enlist in the army."

Simply, briefly, and that was all.

(This completes the introduction, which has taken a reverse rather than a direct-forward motion. Short sentences, for vividness and crackle. Complete reporting: "41 days of being 16 years old" rather than an indefinite "not yet quite 16 years old.")

"He went with a friend and never came home again," his mother explained today. "He'd been talking about enlisting, but we never took him seriously. We expected him to come home within a week, because he'd gone off like that once before, saying he was going to San Francisco, and then really spending a week with relatives in Milwaukee."



(Skillful background. It makes the reader more acquainted with the youth, and, by introducing his mother, keeps it a "here" rather than an "in Canada" story. Thorough reporting again, allowing use of direct quotes.)

But the McSherrys were surprised a few days later. They received a note, a cryptic little communication, from the son who would have been a Middleton high-school junior had he stayed home.

"I'm in!" John wrote.

(Note how the "high-school junior" bit has been slid in delicately, to reinforce the mood of the whole story—"too young to go to war." A good instance of effectiveness obtained by indirection or by understatement rather than by top-of-the-voice writing.)

His letter was postmarked Toronto, and expressed excitement over joining the Canadian forces, disappointment because the air corps had rejected him for wearing glasses.

John was ready to solo, and wanted to be a commercial aviator. He had been taught by Howard Morey, Madison municipal airport manager.

And so here he was, 600 miles away from home, no longer two years away from high-school graduation, but (he told army officials) "22 years old and Toronto born."

That subterfuge had netted him enlistment in the 48th Highlanders regiment, 1st brigade.

(Note the abundance of specific information—the result of thorough interviewing.)

John McSherry?

No. He's No. 73340, in Company A, a machine gun unit.

What does No. 73340 think of his army life, into which he thrust himself so prematurely?

"It's strict, but it's swell," he has written home. "I like it. Everybody has to go to church on Sunday, and we always have to be in bed by 9:30 P.M. We can stay out until 12:30 only one night a week.

"They feed us pretty well, except they are 'tight' when it comes to serving eggs or milk."

(Carefully the writer chooses quotes to support and augment the "keynote" of this section, "It's strict, but it's swell.")

Where her son is now, Mrs. McSherry can only hope. He wouldn't tell his parents what his regiment plans were, and they had sailed from Halifax two days before a telegram Mrs. McSherry sent had arrived.

John did write a "girl friend" that his regiment was going to Cairo, Egypt, to relieve another unit.

"I certainly hope he really is stationed there, where there probably won't be any fighting," Mrs. McSherry said.

(In three short paragraphs, good reporting plus good writing develop an anxiety as to where John is and then resolve the strain coming from that anxiety. "Mood writing," and good.)

The only fighting her son has mentioned in his letters, the last of which arrived a month ago today, has been the soldiers' scrambling for cigarets the time they were rationed, and then the sham battles with blank cartridges, scheduled weekly for the regiment.

"The officers tried giving the men only 42 cigarets a week, but it just wouldn't work," John wrote. "They couldn't enforce the rule."

Then, once a week, the soldiers marched out ten miles from the barracks. There, on an old battlefield, they had sham battles "just for practice."

"After that is the one night we always sleep well," John penned.

(A good "change of pace," to keep the story from being too tense or taut. Also its point of view shows that John, even though he's in the army now, is still a schoolboy.)

Parading in an Armistice day celebration gave young McSherry a chance to wear his plaid kilts, knee socks, and a Scotch cap. That's a uniform similar to the Scotch Highlanders' dress in the World War, when their enemies nicknamed them "the ladies from hell"—because their kilts looked like ladies' dress, and they fought like. . . .

(An excellent paragraph, beginning with juvenile pride in a colorful uniform and ending with a grim reminder that soldiering isn't all parades.)

John has been uncommunicative about his regiment plans because he's afraid "mother would make me come home."

Yes, war . . . excitement . . . adventure. They all loomed large before tall, mature-looking, Scotch-Irish John McSherry.

He's a "ser bonny lad, ye see," and if there's a thrill to be found, he's after it.

(Effective repetition of the wording used near the start of the story.

(Whose story was it, John's or his mother's? Both, though a bit more John's. To bring in two leading characters in so short a writing is excellent, and difficult.)

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## 31

### CITY-HALL REPORTING

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#### ANOTHER LANGUAGE

COVERING THE CITY HALL involves three considerations: (1) Learning a new language; (2) Knowing when to look blank and say nothing; (3) Writing like a Pulitzer prize winner.

Only in a smaller city is the new reporter likely to see city hall professionally, for in the metropolis the run is reserved for the reporters of thorough seasoning. In many offices it is a top-salary beat, and in some of them it is flubbed atrociously.

City hall means city government, which in turn means taxes and municipal services. The Federal Government, even the state government, may seem too far away for many a citizen to regard it as spliced directly into his personal affairs, but the municipal machinery always and obviously is one of his concerns. Why isn't his street sanded after the sleet storm? Call city hall and complain. Can the neighbor who plays his radio full-tone after midnight be restrained? Call the city hall and find out. Does the ash collector come on the first and third or the second and fourth Wednesdays? They'll know at city hall. The realty man says this for-sale house is assessed for only \$5,500; is he telling the truth? City hall knows the answer.

Most newspapers deal generously, if reluctantly, with city government news. "We've got to carry this stuff. It's important, but nobody reads it." The city-hall intelligence is reported painstakingly and is written intelligently, but it is too little read because the writing, however competent, isn't lucid and isn't interesting. The new reporter's chance for an aura will come

less from outshining his predecessor in thoroughness than from outshining him in writing craftsmanship. Consider now the three requirements:

1. Learning a new language. Inexorably, yes. Reporter Dave is in a new world once he steps inside city hall, a world whose residents don't talk as do those of the outside universe. If Dave is to understand them, he must learn their speech, for only then can he find out their problems, their ways of thinking, and their prejudices. "Oh, city hall's simple enough," someone objects. "Why make it so hard?"

That objector wouldn't try to pass the state medical board examinations after skimming the first half-chapter of a book on anatomy. He would say, "Medicine is highly intricate; I must study, and study, and study." City hall is so highly intricate that he must study persistently. Reporters don't "pick up" familiarity with the government; they are students of that government, at least as much so as the fellow working for a doctor of philosophy degree in political science. Unless they are perpetual students, they are mere stopgap reporters.

They must learn the language of the city-hall folk, and learn it so completely that they not only comprehend it but can translate it into the vocabulary of the ordinary reader. Until that translating is supplied, city-hall news will receive less than its proper appreciation.

"The council then recessed to meet as the committee of the whole," will baffle many readers, unless Reporter Dave adds a few explanatory words, such as, "thereby excluding the public from the discussion."

Dave may be able without conscientious study to glimmer what's happening at city hall, but never can he translate it into the tongue of the average citizen. That ability to translate is the mark of the truly capable city-hall man.

2. Knowing when to look blank and say nothing. Municipal employes always are barefoot pilgrims on a scorching desert. Whatever they do may become at any moment the subject of intense and unsympathetic public interest. City officials, accordingly, put every word on the scales before they say it. A carelessly phrased remark may stir a controversy that kills an

official's job. "Those South-Siders are a bunch of pikers," the zoning commission chairman says in a moment of huff. He didn't mean it quite that way, and the moment he has finished saying it he realizes that he has made himself a target for South-Side patriots. "Tone it down, Dave," he pleads. "Make it sound right." Dave does. When a new reporter is assigned to city hall, the chairman, realizing that often he speaks too bluntly, cultivates silence until he is confident that the reporter can be trusted to phrase remarks to present their intent rather than only the crudity of a too-vigorous speaker.

Officials are taciturn until they are satisfied that Dave not only is essentially fair but that he can distinguish between an explanation given him for his own background information and one made for publication.

Reporter Dave must be a diplomat. The city-hall workers aren't one big happy family. Building Commissioner Ryan is just aching for a chance to slap down Health Officer Brown, who in turn will do anything he can to crack at Assessor Humphreys. Dave must deal with all three men. He must be a confidant of each, and a partisan of none. If he slaps into print everything he hears at city hall—where rumors and gossip are as ceaseless and vicious as at an all-day sewing bee—he will find that the only person who will talk to him is himself.

3. Writing like a Pulitzer prize winner. If his stories are opaque, his readers will be few. Even lucidity isn't enough. Governmental news is congenitally complex; unless it is presented attractively, sparkingly, readers slight it as much as they can. The story of a gangfight is automatically interesting; it has conflict, personalities, drama. The monthly report of the sealer of weights and measures is inherently dull; it has nothing but statistics. Unless Dave is so good a writer that he makes statistics interesting, the story will not be read beyond the first paragraph.

City hall, then, is one of the hardest assignments a reporter can be given, but it is also one of the most interesting. Learning and following the windings and twistings of the municipal lane gives the satisfaction that comes from being an authority.

"Oh say, Dave, the planning board has hit a snag; it can't do

anything about putting traffic lights on Sheridan Avenue. Some state-law curlicue." The city auditor passes on this suggestion for a story and Dave brisks into the planning board office. There he finds that Section 38 of the Highway Statutes, as amended in 1932, gives the state rather than the city control of certain thoroughfares that anyone would say without hesitation were local and therefore under city jurisdiction. The city, it seems, once cajoled the county into paying for the repaving of the last block of Sheridan Avenue, the block that goes eighty feet beyond the city line. Then part of the block had to be ripped up to put in a sewer, and the county refused to act, whereby the state, under Section 38, put up the money and in return obtained the final voice in what should be done with the street—the entire street, not just the one block that stretched beyond the city line.

All very complicated, as the planning board chairman describes it, and even more complicated as he explains exultingly and with much palm-rubbing how the city found a kink that enables it to reassert control of all except that last block, and now, by the Lord Harry, there *will* be two new traffic lights on Sheridan Avenue.

Here is a story building out of an always-interesting formula, "state interference with city home-rule." Hundreds of readers will follow this news eagerly, if it is presented so they can understand it. Dave understands it, and he sees how clever the planning board has been. He is one of a dozen persons in the whole city who could comprehend the situation on the first telling, or even the second. He is an authority, a man who knows the answers without looking them up in the back of the book. There is high psychological satisfaction in being such an authority.

Dave does not become an expert overnight. Many city editors say that a city-hall reporter is a greenhorn until he has been on the beat a year. When a staff shake-up is due, the city-hall man is one of the last to be shifted; it will take so long to train his successor.

When Dave combines with his expertness a true writing skill he is one of reporting's aristocracy. He "is somebody," a very important somebody.

City-hall organization is completely unstandardized in two respects: (1) The nomenclature and details of duties of officials

and departments varies greatly with the city; (2) The extent to which duties are divided and subdivided differs with the individual city. Yet in its broad outlines, municipal organization lends itself to a classification into nine branches. Notice that various officers and departments require listing in more than one category. The branches are:

I. EXECUTIVE, OR POLICY MAKING.

1. *The mayor*, who derives his authority from two powers, of vetoing the work of the city council and of appointing various departmental executives. How much real power the mayor wields hinges upon two considerations:

(a) His personal relations with the city council. Exactly as the President sometimes works with an acquiescent and sometimes with a rebellious Congress, so the mayor has the assistance or opposition of the council.

(b) The specifications of the city charter, especially in regard to the size of vote by which the council can override the mayor's veto and in regard to the number of appointments to office the mayor is permitted to make, sometimes with council ratification and sometimes without.

In normal circumstances, the mayor is the fountainhead of information as to city policy, since he initiates policy and usually obtains the council's approval. Sometimes, however, the mayor is taciturn, by accident or design, and forecasts or explanations of the municipal policy come more frequently from two or three of his associates.

2. *The city manager*, found in a minority of cities. Theoretically he is a "general superintendent," carrying out the orders issued by the "board of directors," the city council. The policy-making supposedly is the function of the council. In actuality, the manager, through personal prowess and superior acquaintance with the minutiae of city affairs, may be the originator of policy, with the council acting as ventriloquist's dummy and saying "yes" whenever questioned. Yet the manager's official authority ends in the right to recommend; whether it cares to employ the power, the council has the authority to tell the manager what to do and to enforce its demands.

Some cities have both a mayor and a manager. The mayor is a



ritualistic officer, who makes speeches and welcomes visitors; the manager is the working executive.

3. *The city council*, the abiding place of the ultimate authority. No rules or ordinances binding upon the public are legal until approved by the council. The council may delegate authority, for example giving the police department the right to make temporary and limited changes in the parking system. What the mayor proclaims in his inaugural message as the "municipal ambitions" remains mere rhetoric until the council sanctions the proposals which would implement those "ambitions."

## II. THE LEGISLATIVE.

1. *The city council*, sole custodian of the authority to make municipal laws. Smaller cities favor a unicameral or one-house council; larger communities may have two divisions, the board of aldermen and the common council. The chief difference is that in the first instance a single vote is enough to approve or to kill a proposal, and in the second instance the proposal must be acted upon by both branches.

The council has two systems of work. Proposed legislation is referred to a "standing," or permanent, or to a "special" committee which considers the proposal and reports to the full membership whether the measure should be accepted or rejected. A time-tested means of killing a proposal on which the council is reluctant to take an open vote is to keep the measure in committee, with no formal report ever made to the full council, or to keep referring the measure to committee for further study and amendment.

## III. LIAISON.

1. *The city clerk* is also the clerk or secretary to the city council. It is his duty to have official cognizance of the status at any moment of proposed legislation, and it is he who lists on the "call" or "order" for a council meeting the items to be considered. These two works keep him in such intimate contact with the mayor or city manager and the council that he is the official best able to predict the ultimate fate of a proposal.

The clerk, though an elective officer, in many cities is rather more permanent than are most officials. Even though the control of the council is won by the "other party," the clerk is likely

to remain in office despite his membership in the ousted party. Voters have some reluctance to turn out a good city clerk; generally it takes a true upheaval to bring in a new clerk.

2. *The city messenger*, a seemingly minor official of broad and penetrating knowledge. He is merely a "messenger boy," carrying communications from one official to another, but he is in such close touch with the various departments that he rivals the city clerk as an information source. In more than one city, the reporter begins his day with a chat with the messenger who tells him "what's in the air" at the moment.

#### IV. RECORDING OFFICERS.

One of a municipality's major works is that of keeping records, so that it can tell who has been granted the right to perform certain acts. The recording rarely is concentrated; it is diffused throughout the departments, and often is accompanied by the issuing of licenses or permits. Which officer keeps which records and issues which permits depends upon the individual city.

1. *The city clerk* always shares in these activities. He may keep a record of the births, deaths, and marriages, of the dog licenses issued, of the permits given to garagemen to sell radiator alcohol, and of the licenses given to milk dealers. Other times some of these records and licenses are cared for by other departments, such as the health board.

2. *Specialized departments*, such as that of the building commissioner who grants the permit necessary to erect a new structure or to raze or remodel an existing building. The police department may issue permits to carry pistols, and the electrical inspector may give the permits to wire or rewire a building.

In the division of the record-keeping and license-granting there is no tinge of standardization; the list of "who does what" must be learned anew for each city.

#### V. MUNICIPAL-SERVICE DEPARTMENTS.

These agencies conduct the services given the residents in return for their taxes. Among them are the protective services, such as the police and fire departments; the educational services, such as the school department and the library board; the supply services, such as water department and gas and electric system;



public, but in the second case, it was chiefly an "engineering" matter in which technical considerations were dominant. Of course, if the new chlorinating gives the water a peculiar taste, the public may complain and the considerations will shift from technical to general.

The distinction between categories V and VI, despite their occasional overlapping, is important to the reporter. Asking information about category V, he goes to the "control board" members; asking about category VI, he goes to the "working personnel" first and may approach the "control board" members only if the categories seem likely to overlap.

Among the maintenance departments will be the street, park, sewer, garbage removal, and school departments or subdepartments.

#### VII. ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES.

Laws and ordinances do not enforce themselves; hence an appreciable part of the municipal endeavor is directed toward obtaining public observance of the rules and regulations. That observance is obtained by a system of licensing, a system of inspection, and a system of protection.

Licensing, already discussed, is a weapon, in that anyone found exercising a privilege for which a permit is required but not having that permit automatically becomes subject to legal penalty.

Inspection is a systematized check to see that the rules are being obeyed. The sealer of weights and measures, as an instance, tours the city to examine scales and pumps. If they give correct weight or measure, he approves them; if not, he orders them removed from service until their faults have been remedied. Inspection sometimes is combined with the licensing system. A resident who builds a house must obtain from the electrical inspector a permit to install wiring, and then must have the inspector examine that wiring before it may be put into service. How many licensing and inspection machineries exist depends upon the city; one will be very strict, and another quite unconcerned, about the quality of milk sold within the municipality.

The protective system, exemplified by the police and fire departments, is intended to care for "spontaneous" situations. The

electrical inspector knows that a house is being built and that its wiring cannot be used until he has approved it; he can plan in advance his inspection of that wiring. The fire department, however, has no way of knowing when that house may become afire, and the police have no way of knowing when a murder may be committed within the building. The electrical inspector is as truly concerned with "protecting" the public as are the firemen or the police, but the nature of their protecting is so different that the firemen and the police are viewed as an altogether different sort of agency.

Because their personnel is so much larger than that of many city departments, the fire and police systems sometimes are, or seem to be, deeper tainted with politics. Because their relation to the public is so much more obvious and frequent, these two departments often receive a much more detailed reporting than do the "behind the scenes" divisions such as the sealer of weights and measures and the plumbing inspector.

#### VIII. LEGAL.

Municipal business is too intricate to operate without a distinct division devoted to legal questions.

1. *The city attorney* is both a trial lawyer and a municipal attorney-general. As trial lawyer, he defends the city in suits brought against it. As attorney-general, he rules upon interpretations of the city ordinances and upon the possible effect of proposed actions. For example, the city council considers closing certain hill streets so that children may coast on them without danger of being run over. A nervous councilman asks whether such an action would make the city liable for damages if a youngster were hurt while coasting on one of these "certified" streets. The city attorney is queried, and his decision may be a deciding factor in adopting or rejecting the proposal.

Ordinarily the city attorney is little in the news. Yet he is making many decisions of importance as well as interest to the residents. An off-duty fireman rushed into a house where he saw smoke, put out the flames, and then tripped on a rug. Is the city liable for the hospital bills and for his wages while he recovers from the resultant broken leg? The city attorney must decide.

2. *The city clerk* is an altogether unofficial but well-informed guide to legal questions. Because of long tenure in office and of close contact with each department, he often can—and will—give a completely informal but substantial analysis of a situation on which the attorney is not yet ready to speak. Of course, the clerk cannot now be quoted by name, but such a round-about reference as “sources close to city hall believed” will make his views printable.

#### IX. THE FINANCIAL.

*The assessor* or *board of assessors* will determine what tax rate must be invoked to meet a specified budget and what each property owner's share of the tax levy will be. The *collector* is in charge of receiving tax money due the city. The *treasurer* or *comptroller* keeps the city's books and handles the details of bond issues and debt retirement. The *auditor* inspects and verifies these books.

Here is the municipal phase most likely to be neglected by the reporter, simply because he does not understand its work. He does not know the financial language. For an instance, the collector announces that tax collections are \$61,000 in excess of the total at the same time last year, and the reporter writes a jubilant story. He slipped, because he forgot that Westcote Village, formerly a governmental entity, now is part of the city and hence its tax money comes into the municipal coffers, just as its expenses now are charged against the city.

Ordinarily the financial officials talk freely with a reporter only when they have come to know him. They recognize the danger of misquotation or of a twisted interpretation.

Municipal nomenclature is a mystery. Why should the public library be administered by a “board of trustees,” the police department by a “public safety commission,” and the water supply by a “department”? Learning the intricacies of terminology is among the reporter's first duties. Until he realizes that “boards,” “commissions,” and “departments” are, in general, variants of the term “control board,” he will have difficulty.

One municipal department was omitted from the nine categories, the public welfare department, concerned with assisting the poor. It classifies under several divisions: No. IV, record-

keeping; No. V, municipal service; No. VII, enforcement, to see that the unworthy do not receive city money; No. VIII, legal, to decide eligibility for relief money; and No. IX, financial. Relief systems differ so greatly from one community to another that it would be dangerous to attempt to summarize them; the reporter learns how his city handles the problem, and expects that if he goes to a paper in another city he must acquaint himself with a new system. The increased attention paid to old-age pensions undoubtedly will impinge upon the work of the welfare officers, whether or not assistance to the aged is handled as a separate activity or is joined wholly or partially with existing relief agencies.

### THE SAMARITAN

Learning the people in city hall is no more difficult than becoming acquainted with any other specialized group. As fast as he learns the language and shows that he is reliable, Dave is accepted. Frequently one or two well-informed and well-disposed persons take pity on him in his greenhorn days and steer him to countless stories that otherwise he would miss. The city messenger, thirty years a municipal worker, is a clearing house of information. Though this friend may not have all the material needed for a story, he knows whom to see and what questions to ask. Department heads sometimes tell this clearing-house man of developments they would like to see proclaimed but cannot themselves reveal for reasons politic or political. An early part of Dave's work will be locating and cultivating a one-man clearing house.

A second step, common to every reporter on a beat, is to learn the personal peculiarities of the people with whom he has daily dealings. The health officer enjoys being kidded. "Hello, Barney. How many bubonic plagues have we today?" The city clerk is more formal. "Good morning, Mr. Wheeler. What have you for me today?" The assessor is a fine man to see when Dave is out of cigarettes; the almoner, a fine man to avoid unless Dave is in position to give them. The treasurer speaks the truth when he says, "No news today," but the city attorney, who always begins with "No news this morning," will talk baseball for fifteen

minutes and then dig out material for stories. Dave has no standardized way of dealing with city officials; he handles each individually.

While he learns the city-hall personnel, Dave is an unfailing caller at the offices where many records are kept, for from these records he gets enough daily stories to give the run a fairly sizable, if routine, showing in the paper. From the city clerk, for example, he gets the daily marriage license list, from the building commissioner the permits granted for construction and for alterations to existing buildings, and from the board of health the contagious-disease cases reported within the last twenty-four hours. He visits each department office, even when he knows that some calls will produce no news. He is getting established, studying the officials and letting them study him, so that the acquaintance necessary before they will talk freely can develop rapidly. Gradually he classifies the offices according to their news production. Some he continues to visit daily, or several times a day; others he frequents only once or twice a week. Before he relegates an office to the twice a week category, he makes sure that he has an effective understanding, so that some one in that office will notify him promptly if news breaks between his scheduled visits.

Which places will be on the everyday docket depends upon the city. Always the mayor, the city clerk, and the clearing-house man are consulted at least once a day. In one city the assessor knows all, tells all, so that his office is a regular stopping place, not because he has daily news of his own department, but because Dave picks up there so many tips on what the other departments may be doing. In another city the assessor is a fortnightly port of call.

One of Dave's first lessons teaches him that he comes out newsless if his attack is a random, "What's going on today?" The answer will be, "Nothing, I guess." He must become so conversant with the government that he can ask specific questions. He must know that early February, rather than late January, is the time to ask the city engineer which streets are on the tentative list for spring and summer improving. When Dave knows what each department should be doing at this time of year, he can ask specific and tongue-loosening questions. This doesn't mean



that city-hall news is mainly repetition of annual or seasonal stories. It means that when he knows a department's normal activities, he can spot any unusual works before they have faded into ancient history. The sealer of weights and measures begins to infest the city attorney's office. Dave's brain isn't overtaxed in deciding that the sealer has run into a problem regarding the full-measure ordinances. Inquiries bring out that the sealer is at work on revisions, to be presented to the city council for approval. An unobservant or half-informed reporter would have seen nothing noteworthy in the sealer's frequent trips to the law department.

#### WHEN THE CHIEF WON'T TALK

City hall is a fine place for Dave to learn that underlings can give tips but not official statements. The subordinates are not the policy-makers and must be everlastingly careful what they say lest an executive discipline them for trespassing upon his authority. "What's back of this new form of water bill, Joe?" asks Dave. "Well, it's like this. . . ." The subordinate explains, and inevitably ends with a warning, "That's what it all means, Dave, but you'll have to get it from the superintendent. I'd lose my job if you quoted me." With the story already dredged, Dave goes to the water superintendent to obtain it officially.

The superintendent meets Dave's queries with "Nothing to say." If Dave knows the story is ripe, he uses it, carefully emphasizing that the information didn't come from the superintendent and above all not even hinting where it did originate. Or again, he knows the city hall well enough to realize that often two or three officials can speak authoritatively on an item. If one is mum, he goes to another. With this blasting-out of information he combines expediency; he may prefer to defer a story rather than break it today and provoke the hostility of an official who can retaliate by bottling up many other stories. It's as good fun as a bridge game.

The building commissioner is wearing out scores of lead pencils. "Looks like you're planning a new building code. Tell me about it." A shake of the head. "Sorry, Dave, but I can't say a word. It's the mayor's idea; ask him." The commissioner did his

pencil-pushing ostentatiously so that Dave would be certain to notice it. The commissioner wanted information to come out but he couldn't talk because the mayor was the motive power. Ergo, he put Dave on the mayor's trail.

### NOT TOO MUCH POLITICS

Because covering the city hall means covering the city council, Dave is in danger of coloring all his stories with a political tint. The councilmen are elected as Republicans or as Democrats, except in the cities where municipal elections are "nonpartisan" and in some of them the absence of a party label fails to keep the voting from being Republicans *vs.* Democrats. Beyond doubt, some city council actions are completely partisan. The eight Republicans vote for each of the mayor's appointees, and the four Democrats vote against them. Many other times, however, the council's actions truly are nonpolitical. The vote against buying the Crossman estate for an addition to Blount Park saw five Republicans and two Democrats voting against three Republicans and two Democrats. Dave writes that the issue "shattered party lines." Perhaps it did, but frequently other lines took the battering. It might have been East Side *vs.* West Side or silk-stocking wards *vs.* dinner-pail wards, or center-of-city wards *vs.* outlying wards. To interpret the council forever on a political-party basis is not only inaccurate but harmful. It suggests to readers that government is determined wholly by questions of party fealty and that the common good forever goes unconsidered. Almost always the truth is somewhere between; there is politics, quite possibly of the peanut sort, and there is some weighing of the public interest as such rather than as votes at the next election. If readers have it hammered into them with every issue of the paper that the city council used Republican (or Democratic) spectacles today, that it used them yesterday, that it will use them tomorrow, readers look upon the councilmen as political puppets far more than actually they are. To present government as more controlled by politics than really it is does appreciable damage to the institutions of democracy.

Playing the political angle is one of Dave's surest ways of

seeming to be a city-hall authority before he is one. It is thoroughly a bad way.

Assuredly the political interpretation should not be extended to the permanent or semipermanent municipal employes except in the minority of occasions when they are genuinely party-minded. George H. Howland has been water superintendent for nineteen years; only his closer friends know whether he votes Republican, Democratic, or fifty-fifty. To suggest that his opposition to letting the adjacent village of Cowansburg buy its water from the city is due to the fact that Cowansburg habitually votes Democratic is both stupid and calumnious. When politics does dominate a city government, say so frankly, but remember that this common accusation often is made without justification.

#### FORECAST STORIES

City-hall stories break into two main groups: the account of what has happened, and the relation of what is expected to happen. The forecast is much the harder story to handle, and frequently the more interesting to read. Contrast several specimens.

Here is a "factual forecast," devoid of any interpretation. It can be written from the city clerk's "call" or "order" for the meeting. It is entirely safe, even for the novice reporter:

Three items are on the city council's schedule for its meeting tomorrow night. The first asks the council to renew its prohibition of last year upon the sale or use of July Fourth fireworks, the second asks for \$1,635 for lifeguards at Mile Pond, Lake Dayton, and Lake Omanchee this summer, and the third asks for revocation of the Hotel Andrews's liquor license.

Look now at an "interpretive forecast" telling the possible significance of the meeting. How accurate this forecast may be hinges wholly upon Reporter Dave's sizing up of the municipal situation. If he knows the city thoroughly, this editorializing is acceptable, but if he is too new on the beat to have more than on-the-surface interpretations he is going altogether too far.

Three important and controversial items are on the city council's schedule for its meeting tomorrow night. The growing hos-

tility between North-Side and South-Side aldermen is expected to come into the open on at least two and perhaps all three issues.

The first is the proposal to renew last year's prohibition upon the sale and use of July Fourth fireworks. The North-Siders forced through a ban on fireworks last year, against strong protests from South-Side members who argued that most of the fireworks were sold in their wards and gave small shopkeepers a much-needed chance to make a little extra profit. The North-Siders again want a "quiet" Fourth and the South-Siders still are thinking about the small shopkeepers.

The second item for tomorrow night asks for \$1,635 for lifeguards at Mile Pond, Lake Dayton, and Lake Omanchee this summer. The fight this time will be between the "economy bloc" and the "spenders," but may develop into a North-Side *vs.* South-Side battle, since only one of the beaches is on the North Side.

The final item is a request by the license committee to revoke the liquor license of the Hotel Andrews, on Chapin Street. The South-Siders will argue that the Andrews, a modest priced rooming house, has not violated the terms of its license any more than have the larger hotels, against which no action has been threatened. The North-Side aldermen will say that the Andrews has broken the rules "flagrantly" and should be made "an example."

This interpretive forecast tells the expected tint of the council meeting but does not predict what the votes will be. That predicting is saved for the ultimate in interpretive reporting. Only the most experienced and well-informed reporter has a right to this ultimate story and he will use it sparingly because so often it will be impossible to predict accurately what decisions the council will make. The "yes" votes and the "no" votes may be five each, with two aldermen uncertain and their final decision absolutely unpredictable. For a new hand at city hall to try this much interpreting is conceit. Here is the story, for experts only:

The city council tomorrow night will refuse to renew last year's prohibition upon the sale and use of July Fourth fireworks, but will vote \$1,635 for lifeguards at Mile Pond, Lake Dayton, and Lake Omanchee this summer, and will suspend rather than revoke outright the liquor license of Hotel Andrews, on Chapin Street.

These three items will constitute the principal business of the meeting, at which the growing hostility between North-Side and South-Side aldermen will come into the open, with voting upon geographical lines.

Dave agrees that such hazardous forecasting is for only the old-timer, yet wishes to advance speedily beyond the "factual forecast." He can advance quickly and with fair safety by means of the "background interpretation" in which he tells the history of an item with a minimum of forecasting, and that little amply shinguarded by qualifications:

Three much-discussed items are on the city-council schedule for its meeting tomorrow night, when the latent hostility between North-Side and South-Side aldermen threatens to come into the open.

The first item asks a renewal of last year's prohibition on the sale and use of July Fourth fireworks, the second asks for \$1,635 for lifeguards at Mile Pond, Lake Dayton, and Lake Omanchee this summer, and the third asks revoking of the liquor license of Hotel Andrews, on Chapin Street.

Fireworks were prohibited last year for the first time. Aldermen from the residential districts had argued repeatedly that fireworks should be prohibited, and spokesmen for small shopkeepers had retorted that fireworks gave the storekeepers a chance for much needed profit. Last year the Women's Club presented a petition with 835 signatures, from all parts of the city, asking that fireworks be outlawed, and the prohibition was passed by one vote.

The request for lifeguards continues a policy adopted in 1936 when \$1,050 was appropriated. Each year the council has granted a slightly larger fund. The amount asked this year is \$85 more than was voted last year.

The move to revoke the hotel's liquor license comes from the council license committee. Details of the charges against the hotel have not been made public, but the committee gave the hotel manager a hearing before it voted to recommend that the license be withdrawn.

This may not have the know-it-all ring of the next preceding specimen but it is adequate evidence that the reporter knows city hall. In essence, it is simply an elaboration of the "factual forecast" but it is a safe elaboration. Being an expert is grand fun, but being an expert too soon means reckless predictions that later must be confessed as bad guesses which the reporter hopes readers won't remember.

## THE EASY-TO-QUOTE ALDERMEN

Dave discovers early in his city-hall exploring that certain aldermen will comment on anything. Out of a dozen, three or four are of fluent and perpetual comment. Wishing substance for a forecast, Dave calls these three or four and too much bases his prognostication on what they say. If they are "for" a proposal, he predicts that it will carry and sometimes finds out that the vocal giants represent a minority viewpoint and that the proposal loses. Sampling the same few sources too often has another danger.

That danger is that in his reports of council meetings Dave quotes unfailingly the three or four aldermen of easy comment, and overlooks or minimizes the contributions of the others, thereby picturing the three or four as "the men who count." Because he knows them so well, he builds them up as the council's keystones, and they may not deserve it. Emphasizing the aldermen who always will comment on a pending proposal is psychologically difficult to resist. Dave is a shrewd reporter when he realizes that these quick talkers may not be safe guideposts to the attitude of the whole council.

In his advance stories of council meetings Dave forever is writing for two audiences. One is the readers of the paper and the other has but three members: the city editor, the news editor, and the make-up editor. Council meetings usually come early in the week, when the paper is small. Dave hopes so much that the advance story will impress the three editors, who decide whether the later story of the meeting goes page 1 or page 6, that he intensifies the advance too much. He wants those three editors so moved by the advance that they give the later chronicle right of way. Never would it do to say in effect, "Tomorrow night's council meeting will be flat and dull." However flat, the meeting may require three-quarters of a column if it is to be reported in perspective. Dave whets the editors' appetites for the later story by predicting in the advance that the meeting will be a battle and a gangfight:

The first gun in a new campaign for elimination of grade crossings in the city was fired last night by Alderman Robert A. Jackson

of Ward 3 who announced that he will offer at the council meeting tomorrow night an order to investigate the recent accident in which. . . .

What actually happened is that Dave called Jackson, very much in the know, and asked how dead the meeting would be. Jackson agreed that it would be listless. "No fireworks of any sort?" Dave persisted. "Well," Jackson hesitated, "maybe I'll raise a little hell about that grade-crossing accident last week." From that, Dave devised the "opening gun" platitude. When Jackson read that he was starting "a new campaign" he was completely surprised and told his wife that journalism must be a most interesting work. Such a "midsummer special" may indeed put the three editors into an appreciative frame of mind, but it dissipates quickly when the later story reveals that the predicted explosion didn't come.

#### REPORTING COUNCIL MEETINGS

Dave's real worry comes with his first council meeting. He did not expect a formal and deliberate reading of every item on the meeting-call, but he was not braced for the mumbled whisper with which at least the routine items are announced and the rapidity with which the vote is taken. He didn't hear more than half the announcement of the order and the item was civic history before he had finished counting how many aldermen said "yes" and how many said "no." Before the next meeting, he consults the city clerk for a copy of the call and thereby is better able to follow the rapid-fire items.

He learns also that "passed by voice vote" is adequate for secondary actions. The bigger proposals are argued, voting may be by raising the hand rather than gargling a "yes" or "no," and frequently the aldermen stand and are counted so that the presiding officer can verify that the vote was 6 to 4 rather than 5 to 5.

Usually the "press table" is near the city clerk's desk, sometimes so near that Dave can lean over for a whispered question. At any rate, Dave is near enough to slide along a penciled plea, "Who's that fellow?" or to buttonhole the clerk at the end of the meeting and ask for explanations.

Naturally Dave learns who the aldermen are. He had better learn them by their faces rather than by their location in the room, for an alderman who generally sits in one corner may take a new position to escape a draft, and thereby tangle Dave's still-tentative system of identification.

When private citizens are testifying, Dave must identify them quickly. If Dave does not recognize them, he asks the city clerk who frequently does know. A pact can be made in advance with the presiding officer, who agrees to ask each speaker to identify himself.

The first two or three meetings are nightmares, because Dave hasn't been able to sort out the names and voices. This difficulty fades quickly; the stage fright it engenders early in the game is terrific but impermanent.

The aldermen have one procedure Dave must respect scrupulously. When they wish to discuss a proposal informally, they go "into committee," "into executive session," or resolve themselves "into the committee of the whole." Though he may be permitted to attend this part of the process, from which the general public is excluded, Dave accepts it as a completely closed meeting which he is not at liberty to report. For an hour and a half the aldermen have wrangled. Simonson, Ward 2, chirps, "It's almost 11 o'clock and I have to get up before 6 tomorrow morning. Let's go into committee and settle this thing." They do.

Benckes, Ward 4, author of the proposal to license bicycles, says to Harrison, Ward 1, the leading opponent, "Jim, you vote for this and I'll back one of your pets."

"Will you back my coal-yard order, the one you voted against last year?" Harrison asks.

"Yes, I'll vote for even that blankety-blank thing."

"Okay," Harrison agrees. "I'll vote for your bicycle affair, Benckes. Let's get it over with."

The aldermen file back to their chamber, someone moves "the question," and the long-deferred vote is taken. Two minutes "in committee" broke the deadlock, but what was said during those two minutes is unprintable.

The example just cited may not be flattering to the ideals of



democracy, but it is a fairly frequent happening. Men who disagree sincerely have reached a compromise whereby each gets part of what he wants, and the democratic process marches on, only slightly out of step. The "committee of the whole" gives the aldermen a chance to talk with utmost frankness; like anything else it can be abused, but it has a distinctly justifiable purpose. If Dave permits its occasional *quid pro quo* to sour him upon the council, and hence upon democracy, he is shortsighted. Ideals and expediency may not wish to mix, but they have to if either is to survive.

Now and then a council overdoes the "in committee" device and scurries into a secret huddle for every issue about which opinions are strong. This keeps the aldermen from a public proclaiming of their attitudes, which are revealed momentarily when the open meeting is resumed and a vote is jammed through. When the hush-hush is too much, Dave drops hints to a friendly alderman he knows regards the silence as being overdone. Next meeting, Dave goes out for a "coke" during the "in committee" stage, and the friendly alderman later tells him anonymously what was said during the clam interval. Dave prints this "exposure," and when hostile aldermen accost him he says, "I wasn't on hand for your in-committee highjinks; I didn't break any confidences. I'll do the same thing again until you fellows get back to conducting your business in public the way you should." It won't be long before the "in committee" device has shrunk to its proper size.

Council meeting is like Congress; it sometimes embraces a good deal of parliamentary jockeying. Dave learns whether Roberts' or Cushing's manual of procedure is the council's guidepost, borrows it from the public library and learns it by persistent if uninspired study. Only then can he see what Alderman Gardner is up to with his dozens of amendments. Gardner is trying to hitch to an order, of foregone passage, a proposal which, offered as a separate item, surely would be voted down. If he can sneak in his somewhat disguised measure, then the main proposal, so certain of adoption, must be killed if his colleagues are to get rid of his barnacle amendment. He counts that, lured or tricked into accepting his amendment, they will prefer to keep it alive rather than slaughter it by knifing the central order. An alderman who

knows parliamentary procedure can raise havoc with opponents who never bothered to master it, and Dave cannot write a coherent story unless he, too, is skilled in parliamentary methods. Roberts and Cushing are not light reading, but they are on Dave's must-must list. Sorry.

The part that committees play in the council's work always is important. The council has various standing, or permanent, committees, such as street, fire and police, and finance. The chairmen report at each council meeting, even if their reports consist of saying "Nothing this week." Frequently the reports are so routine that Dave will not mention them. The finance committee, for example, presents the payroll and the report is accepted without discussion, thereby allowing the city employes to be paid. The council also has such special committees as are handy. Henry Drury's will left the city a tract for development as a public golf course, but how to develop it is a problem. A special committee is appointed to investigate and advise the council. Dave will be in frequent contact with the members of this committee, so that as it approaches a decision, he can keep readers informed as to the outlook for the golf course. What this committee decides is entirely tentative. The council may accept, reject, or modify the committee recommendations.

When the aldermen wish to defer some proposal upon which they hesitate to vote, generally because they don't know what the public reaction will be, they refer it to a committee, standing or special. The committee keeps the proposal under its wing until public sentiment seems crystallized and then reports "ought to pass," "ought not to pass," or simply forgets to make any report at all, thereby killing the proposal without compelling the council to go on record with a vote. Sometimes a desired proposal assumes an undesirable form, probably because of amendments, and the aldermen ship it back to committee, meaning that they give themselves a little more time in which to work upon the details.

To Dave the parliamentary procedures may seem time wasted, and sometimes they are, but he must know them thoroughly if he is to understand all that goes on.

Dave will have a much better story if he takes to the council meeting about twenty sheets of scratch paper for his notes than

if he takes only three. If he has but three, he records his notes as one item after another comes up, and then must unscramble the notes to see which facets he wishes for the top of his story and which for the bottom. He writes rapidly enough, but with a gnawing in his midriff, a warning of something wrong. Only when he is on the next to the last paragraph does he notice that in the middle of the second sheet of notes he has about twenty-six words on "boosting city auditor's salary." Although this discussion was brief, it was one of the most substantial items. Due to its brevity, Dave forgot all about it until now. He must tear the story apart to get the auditor material near enough the top.

Equipped with plenty of paper, he would use a separate sheet for each item of business, and then shuffle the sheets to get the strong items at the top and the weak ones at the bottom. There would be no chance to overlook a short but powerful bit of business because it followed on one sheet of paper five or six long but dreary bits.

#### MECHANICS OF WRITING

Before he writes a city hall story, council or otherwise, Dave decides whether the news is so slight, or so intricate, that it calls for a "feature in the first line," or whether it is so strong and so translucent that it needs no assistance. Until he makes this analysis he does not know what readers will wish to learn about the news, and hence cannot decide how to write it.

The filling station isn't giving five quarts in every gallon of gasoline any more. The law won't let it.

This was the sorry news included in the monthly report that Harold V. Burke, city sealer of weights and measures, submitted today. During the past month he ordered four gasoline pumps out of service pending adjustments because they gave the wrong measure. One of them delivered a quart too much with every gallon.

"Sorry," Mr. Burke commented. "The law forbids a 25 per cent error, even when it's a case of giving too much instead of too little."

Mr. Burke's report listed. . . .

Here is complete justification for a "feature lead." The report roots deep in statistics—scales inspected, 42; adjusted, 5; out of

service until repaired, 3; condemned, 0. Only an avid reader will bother with it unless it has a haircut and a new necktie. By stressing the interest angle rather than the importance aspect, Dave entices scores of readers to this story, thereby giving them, for all the levity, a slightly better concept of the city's business.

The city was \$1,126 richer today than it expected to be.

The windfall was a check from the state in payment of the county school tuition refund. The city had expected to get \$21,206 but instead it received \$22,332.

The increase was due to. . .

This "money story" is laden with dollar signs and longish explanations of a complicated law. By summarizing at the outset, with a one-sentence "snapper lead," Dave not only makes it more interesting but much clearer. A reader who follows only four of the story's nine paragraphs obtains the gist of the news. Notice that the first specimen relied upon facile writing, whereas the second had no "illuminated phrasings" but made its impression by an extreme simplifying, and hence vivifying, of soggy and complicated facts. Facile writing often touches the humorous, even the frivolous, and hence is of questionable utility when the news itself is substantial, though drab. To jest about relocating a water main or about appropriating \$45,000 may be offensive because it presents serious information in too trivial a fashion. Doing this incessantly implants in readers the idea that the municipal business is only a vaudeville show.

When the news is big enough to stand on its own feet, tell it in the most direct fashion:

City Treasurer Herman A. Dines resigned today, after 27 consecutive years in the office. His action was due to failing health.

An attempt to "fortify" news as powerful as this is needless and provoking, unless that fortifying is necessary to clarify an intricate situation. The standard structure is the most direct presentation; readers do not enjoy the retarding inevitable in any "marcelled" writing when the subject automatically stirs their interest.

The city council story frequently should be cut into fragments. The meeting lasted three and a half hours, and the story will make 4,500 words, the better part of five columns. Even with a lead and a secondary lead it will be impossible to put all the strong news at the front. Accordingly, write several stories.

Dave writes a lead story, highly compressed, without details. In this he lists the principal actions taken by the council. A single sentence, or at most a single paragraph, summarizes each action. Then he gives a separate and detailed story to each major item. This gives the reader interested only in the new restrictions the council threatened to inflict upon rooming-house proprietors a chance to find that information without wading through news he doesn't want about the disciplining of a policeman, the petition to pave six streets in Ward 5, and the refusal to change the zoning of the 800 block on Franklin Street.

The several-story procedure is workable only when the make-up editor herds all the council news on one page. Then the related stories are easy to locate. If he puts the rooming-house story on page 3, the lead or roundup on page 7, the street paving on page 12, and the zoning change on page 16, a reader must explore the whole paper before he knows that he has seen all the council information. Few readers will do that. If the make-up editor is unwilling or unable to concentrate the half-dozen council chronicles on one page, Dave has no escape from one long story.

When there is a "council page," Dave helps the make-up editor mightily by writing more but shorter stories rather than fewer and longer. Half-column stories are easier to build into a trim, lively page than are column-and-a-half writings. Dave picks out two, three, or four little human interest bits that can stand alone, writes them engagingly, and thus gives the make-up editor a chance to decorate the page with some italic or other "color" headlines which relieve the monotony of many conventional news headlines. Dave also gives the make-up editor a list of the city council stories, to be checked over when the page is assembled, as a safeguard against losing one story and having it pop up on page 18 instead of the scheduled page 8. A reporter who turns in such a list marks himself as knowing his business.

## BE GENEROUS WITH BACKGROUND

Protracted, and perhaps intermittent, information must carry a throwback to earlier stories on the subject. In November the police and fire committee recommended that Fireman Daniel W. Dooman be disciplined for being drunk while on duty. Dooman asked a chance to tell his side of the matter and was told to appear "next Tuesday night." Monday a house burned and Dooman was injured. The hearing was postponed until he should be out of the hospital. The new date finally was set for December 6. On December 4, Dooman's father died and the hearing was postponed until the 13th. Meantime the committee chairman went to the hospital to have his appendix removed. Finally Dooman had his hearing, on January 21. Each intermediate event received its own story. When January 21 creeps along, the reporter knows the history thoroughly, because it is his job to do so, but many readers have forgotten it or indeed never knew it, if they missed the in-between stories. The January 21 relation, therefore, must have a tie-in with the earlier news, else readers will wonder why Dooman only now is answering accusations brought early in November and erroneously will ascribe the seeming delay to "governmental red tape." Thus their opinion of municipal integrity and efficiency will drop, and unjustified harm has been done to the good esteem of the democratic processes.

This example shows a trap for which Dave must eternally be watchful. He knows the history and the background; many readers do not, and he forgets that they do not. Unless Dave inserts, however briefly, the essence of that history and background, his stories become murky enough that many readers grow a habit of avoiding city-hall news because it seems so blind.

Dave must be alert to explain terms, nomenclature, and situations with which the average reader will have little if any acquaintance:

Seven streets are on the provisional list for repairs, Highway Commissioner James A. Winch announced today. They are. . . .

What, pray, is the "provisional list"? Dave knows that early in the year the department decides where it will do its work, but this

decision is tentative because the retreat of winter may reveal frost or other damage in unexpected places and thus may demand revising the list. Many readers don't understand this and if the term "provisional" is not explained their reaction will be, "Why don't those officials make up their minds once and for all?"

The transfer of \$3,750 from the street department to the excess and deficiency fund was voted by the aldermen last night. This brings the excess and deficiency fund to \$88,450 and is expected to be enough to care for public welfare demands which may exceed the budgetary total, without reducing materially the money available for the street department.

If ever a story bit itself in the hind leg, this one seems to. It declares that a department lost \$3,750 without having its funds reduced appreciably. Unreasonable as this seems, it may be entirely true, because municipal finance—like any other kind—has many contortions and a transfer of funds may be more nominal than actual. If the city is large enough, it has thirty residents who understand at once how the street department can lose \$3,750 without having it hurt; all others must be told, at once. Dave knows that; where he falters is in his manner of explanation. He phrases the explaining in city hall or statutory language; it demands common talk. Here is how a slightly careless Dave will "explain" the paradox:

The transfer of \$3,750 will not materially reduce the street department's available funds, because the state's Chapter 88 reimbursement to municipalities for highway purposes provides for an overlay in the event that the original appropriation is inadequate or later is reduced, providing that reduction does not fall below a minimum of \$165 a mile for maintenance. Last night's action leaves the street department net appropriation at \$167 a mile for Chapter 88 highways, and, since the overlay is proportionate to the amount of inadequacy or subsequent reduction, the addition to the state's contribution will be \$3,245 which means that the street department funds have been reduced only \$505.

Examined two or three times, this is clear, but it will never serve the at-a-glance reader. Rephrase it, explaining such terms as "Chapter 88" and "overlay" and whenever possible translating away from city-hall language into ordinary words:

The transfer of \$3,750 from the street department means a loss of only \$505 to that department, because the transfer will bring a \$3,245 increase in the state's contribution to the city for highways. Under Chapter 88 of the General Laws, the state assists cities and towns in maintaining highways, the amount of this help depending on the average that the city spends per mile of street.

Chapter 88 provides for an overlay, or increase, in this help if the city's funds are inadequate or are reduced after the original appropriation for streets was made. This overlay is figured according to how much the city's money is inadequate or is reduced. The city gets this extra help so long as it averages \$165 or more per mile of street. Last night's transfer of \$3,750 cuts the city's average to \$167, still high enough for it to get the overlay, or extra help. The difference between the \$3,750 transfer and the \$3,245 overlay is \$505, the amount the street department will lose.

This takes more space and is entirely A-B-C. True, but it is much easier to understand, and therefore worth the extra space. When he explains completely and lucidly, Dave's stories will be followed by a much larger group of readers, who thereby become more conversant with and appreciative of the democratic institutions. Those institutions creak and sometimes need a big dab of axle grease, but familiarity with them is a national resource and asset, to be augmented by the newspaper.

In this augmenting, Dave resists the occasional opportunity to be facetious with governmental terminology. Various states give their legislatures the official and resounding name of "the Great and General Court" and Dave, when the legislature has done something hostile to his city, can vent his indignation by such a phrasing as "the Great and General Court, in its infinite wisdom." This may invigorate his copy, but it is a damage to democracy. When he writes a by-line condemnation of the legislature, let him do it directly and seriously instead of through the unfair and over-connotative method of ridicule.

If Dave wishes to crusade a little, he goes to work upon the style sheet. A down-style sheet prescribes that governmental organizations are denied the emphasis—and respect—of capital letters. The state supreme court is lower case, but the Jack-rabbits, the city's Class C baseball team, enjoy a capital letter. To many, many readers the repetition of this discrimination sug-



gests that government is so meaningless or of such low quality that it doesn't deserve the respect given to a very minor league ball team. Why should a reader regard government seriously when the newspaper, from which he obtains much or most of his information about that government, seems so casual? Invest the Supreme Court with capital letters and it seems much more eminent than when it is merely the supreme court. Dave does a praiseworthy missionary work if he campaigns for some governmental caps in the style sheet.

### TEN-SECOND FIGHTS

In his efforts to popularize governmental news, Dave may overdo the sure-fire angles. The aldermen argue for an hour about a \$285,000 installation to soften the city's flinty water. Very important, Dave appreciates, and very yawny. However, Alderman Johnson at one point calls Alderman Bishop a "stupid saphead" and Alderman Bishop retaliates with "flannelmouth." The fight took only a few seconds and was immediately forgotten. Its effect upon the aldermanic action was zero. Yet "fight" always invigorates a story, Dave figures, and he lifts the ten seconds of vituperation into his lead:

A personal quarrel that almost led to a fistfight marked last night's city council meeting at which the proposed \$285,000 municipal water softening plant was debated. Alderman Charles D. Johnson, Ward 3, arguing for the softener, became so enraged at the opposition of Alderman William W. Bishop, Ward 1, that he called Bishop a "stupid saphead."

"You're such a stupid saphead you don't realize this softener would pay for itself in a few years," he shouted.

"I don't need any flannelmouth like you to tell me what this softener would cost the city," Bishop retorted hotly.

Lively? Perhaps, but what did the aldermen do about the water softener? The story has consumed three paragraphs without mentioning that. Dave was so interested in enlivening his story that he forgot the crux of his chronicle.

The city council last night referred back to the special water-supply committee the proposal for a \$285,000 municipal water softener, thereby deferring indefinitely a decision upon the pro-

posal. The action followed an hour's debate during which two aldermen had a momentary personal quarrel.

This is much more in perspective, presents the aldermen more accurately, and answers speedily the readers' query, "Well, do we get that softener or don't we?" The saphead-flannelmouth can come high in the story without interfering with the more significant material.

The more expert Dave becomes in city-hall affairs, the more inclined he is to forget that the generality of readers doesn't know the background and the language of government. He becomes almost too much a specialist reporter. The city-hall vocabulary is completely natural to him. His best way of clarifying stories is to write a compact explanation after each and every bit of city-hall jargon, just as "overlay" was explained. If he builds the habit of doing this, both vocabularies, the city hall and the normal, remain "natural" to him and his stories will be easier to read.

When he gets the city-hall assignment, Dave should genuflect to whatever idols he reveres. He has drawn the beat that can lift him to the highest editorial posts on his paper or can increase mightily his chances of getting an offer from another paper—always presuming that he is willing to let go of the city-hall run. Some reporters like it so much that they won't take any other job.

Of course Dave expects some joshing about his new work. "The mayor will be awful glad to have somebody who can tell him how to run the city. He's needed help for a long time."

Dave grins. "Don't worry, Harry. When I'm mayor, you're going to be my tax collector."

"Can I count on that, Dave?"

"Sure—you're so fat you couldn't run away with the cash."

For all the persiflage, Dave knows that the gods have smiled upon him.

POLITICAL NEWS

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## GOOD FUN, BUT TRICKY

“TAKE A RUN out to Grant’s Hall tonight and listen to Alderman Winslow tell why he’s good enough to be re-elected,” the city editor directs.

“Yes, sir,” Ted acknowledges with a well-feigned flatness. Covering evening meetings is a chore for an afternoon-paper reporter, and office tradition has it that such assignments are to be accepted without enthusiasm, but Ted is warmly glad for this one. Time and time again he has hinted, and finally asked, to “do something with politics.” Now he has the chance.

Ted was wise in coveting a politics assignment. The political reporter watches a world as make-believe as that of Oz and its Wizard, and fully as fascinating, because, make-believe as it is, it also is genuine and real. Political concatenations are absorbing, frequently thrilling, and mastering them so that they are clear and lucid kindles the glow of satisfaction that comes from doing well a job that is hard. More enticing, perhaps, is Ted’s realization that the “politix man” enjoys more freedom in his writing than does anyone else on the staff except the editorial writer. The story slugged “pol” often explains, interprets, passes judgment.

It has to, for political situations have as many roots as an elm tree and few readers know enough political forestry to comprehend a happening unless it is explained, explained fully. The political writer frequently takes two paragraphs of fact as a springboard for six paragraphs of explanation or interpretation. Not mere newspapering, but “journalism,” this business of building a politician’s twenty-two-word remark into a page 1, half-column story.

Expert, specialist reporting—the man who can do it obviously is out of the cub class.

Most true, Ted, this size-up of yours, but it has another side. Few branches of news writing are so tricky as the political, few phases of news gathering so deceptive and difficult as the political. The political reporter either is a crackerjack, one of the best on the staff, or he is a sham and a fraud. Which Ted will be depends on how he accepts his first few “pol” stories.

As with the city-hall run, Ted is under heavy temptation to interpret before he has learned enough about the subject to be able to analyze it, more especially to forecast. He fears that a “straight news” political story brands him as a greenhorn. Actually, it marks him as sensible and discerning. For all that many political writings must be interpretive, relatively few demand “guessing tomorrow’s weather.” The more he becomes an authority, the more Ted realizes that political writing is objective, exactly as is any other news writing, until the information becomes complicated. Then, and then only, is interpreting needed or justified. Far too many reporters believe that every political story requires explaining and forecasting. Ted is wise if he uses his privilege as sparingly as possible.

The main reason for using it sparingly is that even the men twenty-five years in politics often guess wrong. Let Ted recall two presidential election campaigns. Who would have said, one day before it was uttered, that a clergyman’s remark about “Rum, Romanism, and rebellion” would have cost James G. Blaine the 1884 campaign? Who would have guessed that Woodrow Wilson, reëlected in 1916 on the slogan, “He kept us out of war,” by the next April would have changed the American temper so that entrance into the First World War met overwhelming popular approval? Predicting politics is one of the riskiest of endeavors, and Ted will escape it whenever he can.

He draws a sharp line between the interpretation that is a forecast and the one that is a look backward, to show how the present situation came about. Ted remembers that the oracle at Delphi always gave a two-way answer, so that however the actuality developed, the prediction fitted. The Delphian was a smart politician.

So Ted whirls out to Green's Hall to listen to Alderman Winslow. The attendance is about forty, the enthusiasm zero. Winslow gulps hastily through a speech. An aide buttonholes Ted. "Here's a copy of Mr. Winslow's address. You'll want every word of it." Ted feigns appreciativeness. "Thanks much." Next morning he writes three paragraphs. "Wow," the city editor shrieks, "can't you give us more on this? This is big—Winslow's broken with old man Delaney. I'd never have given you that story if I'd dreamed he was going to do anything like that. Chase him and get at least a column on that speech."

Mystified, Ted pulls the alderman's speech from the wastebasket and uncrumples the pages. "Here it is," he says, "but I didn't see what was so wonderful about it. . . ."

The city editor relaxes a moment. "Of course not, Ted; you don't know the background. This is one of the hottest political speeches this city has had in years." His temperature soars again. "Wait until the editorial writers see this. . . . they'll have to put the 'ed' page on asbestos paper today."

#### PICKING UP THE HISTORY

What, specifically, can Ted do to learn the history and stage setting of local politics so that he won't misjudge another story so badly? First, he must circulate among politicians, great and small, politicians of all parties. He must learn the ways, the speech, the habits of thinking of each one. He must learn the history and reputation of each. To do all this he frequents party headquarters and, since often they are dens of dusty idleness until election approaches, he must hunt out the other places where politicians congregate. He must come to know the politicians personally, so that they will talk with him and answer his thousand questions.

In all this building of background, Ted wishes to know certain things:

1. Which politicians are influential and which are not. There will be some surprises here, for the mayor may be a figurehead and the real work may be done by a back-stager who holds no office at all.

2. Which politicians can, and will, give him accurate and

sensible explanations and interpretations. This is entirely a matter of knowing human nature, and of combining his own estimate of a man with other politicians' views of him. Again, he will have an occasional surprise, for it may be that the shrewdest political analyst in the city isn't actively in politics.

3. Which politicians he can trust, and which he cannot. Until he learns this, he is at the mercy of those politicians who wish to use him as a megaphone for their own voices. They give him "explanations" which he prints, because he does not know them well enough to realize that their tongues are cleft by many lies.

4. The local political history—what the past issues have been, how they were decided, what the current issues may be, and what factors are likely to settle them. Mayor McHenry won't seek reelection. He says his realty business needs nursing. The truth may be that he tried to make peace between the A.F. of L. and the C.I.O. and angered both factions so that they will agree only on knifing him.

5. What each party's machine is and how it works. The Republicrats may build their system on capturing the factory-worker vote, and the Democans may work on a religious basis.

In many other fields, Ted could turn to books for information. He learns of local politics by incessant contact with politicians and by vigorous study of the newspaper files of earlier years. He studies, as arduously if not as formally as does the chap preparing for the state bar exams. Emphatically, he cannot listen to six or seven speeches and from them become an expert.

One book Ted must read and reread, Frank R. Kent's *The Great Game of Politics*. From it he will get so much "the feel" of politics that his ripening on the political beat will be very much faster.

Ted must appreciate the thoroughness of political organization. The city is divided into wards and the wards into precincts, each with its own political monarchs. Frank Cluett, 'way out near the city line, has a shanty where he runs a trivial coal, ice, and wood business. A two-day beard smirches his face, his trousers are patched and his shoes slashed at the insteps for comfort of his bunions. He looks almost bad enough to be a tramp, yet in Precinct C of Ward 6 he is the Republicrat dictator. His word

is unquestioned, his command obeyed instantly. Until Ted realizes that Frank Cluett amounts to something politically, Ted is a greenhorn reporter.

When they have learned that he can be trusted, the political fuehrers, halbfuehrers, and unterfuehrers talk freely to Ted. Much of what they tell him is "off the record," at least to the extent that they cannot be named as sources of the information. Ted therefore ascribes it to "well-informed circles." The more he deals with the fuehrers, the more surprised he is. Some are habitually reckless with the truth, yet to Ted they speak bluntly and honestly. "Will we carry the second ward? Not a chance, not a chance." Ted wonders why they deal so honestly with him. It is because they know that if Ted is well informed he can write about their party with a comprehension, and often a sympathy, that otherwise he would lack. The Democans are "machine politicians" of the most vicious kind, yet if they tell Ted the painful truth he will treat them better than he would otherwise. They are right; it is hard to hate a person, or even a machine, one knows well.

### DON'T FORGET THE PUBLIC

In mastering the political scene, Ted walks warily. Often as he hobnobs with the politicians, he also watches the general public to see whether it is following or breaking away from the "professionals." The Republicrats will carry every ward in the mayoralty election; even the Democans admit it, though privately. That is the word in political circles. Ted, living less exclusively in those circles than do the professionals, sniffs the faintest of insurrections. A month before the politicians have stopped laughing at his statement that "this may be a Democan year after all," the insurgency may be outlined clearly on the horizon. Only when it is irresistible do the politicians themselves realize its existence. Such a situation is not common, but neither is it museum-rare. If Ted circulates wholly among the professionals, he will be as surprised as they when the Democans regain power.

Next, Ted becomes as well known to the Democans as to the Republicrats. Whatever his personal beliefs, he must be known in each political lair as unbiased and fair. "That fellow's just a

Republicrat stooge" can kill Ted's chances of being in close contact with the Democans. Under no circumstances can Ted appeal for information on the basis of, "After all, I'm a Democan, too."

When it comes to writing political news, as opposed to gathering information, Ted again is meticulous. He realizes that political stories have an enormous social effect, that he can guide or misguide the public. This is true despite the radio. The politicians buy broadcast time so that their speeches will be more widely circulated, but the public still reads political news, not so much to find out "what he said" as to learn "what meaning is there to what he said?" The broadcast speech is smoky with oratory and emotion. Many readers pick up the newspaper next day to see if the resonance that moved them so much last night is as powerful when divested of the vibrant voice and the crowd's applause. The newspaper is a secondary source of political information, but an increasingly primary source of political analysis.

Ted's first psychological work is to forget whether the editorial page is Republicrat or Democan. Except in a handful of cities where the newspapers still think in the language of 1884, newspapers no longer are party organs. They have party preferences, but nothing stronger. Ted must realize that however Republicrat the editorial page, the news columns are neutral. He will not write like this:

A handful of listeners, never impressed enough to applaud even mildly, last night listened to P. V. Johnson, Democan candidate for mayor, tell, at Lexington Hall, what he would do if the unexpected happened and he should be elected.

Seventy-five years ago such a biased writing would have been mild, for then both editorial and news columns were open to violent invective. Today such writing is intolerable. "Our candidate" no longer is described as addressing an "overflow audience that frequently interrupted with bursts of prolonged applause." Nor is the opposition candidate dismissed with a "small and uninterested audience that yawned more than it listened."

If the student doubts this, let him examine whatever newspapers he will. In all but three out of a hundred, he will not be able to



tell a paper's political hue until he turns to the editorial page. The sooner Ted learns this, the better.

His second caution is to maintain perspective. Here is a candidate so bright with color that he seems to be a spectroscopic convention. He amounts to nothing, but he's a glorious relief from the other candidates. They declaim about tax rates and other mathematics; the sideshow lad jumps on the table, rips off his shirt, sings hymns, and swears lustily. Ted must present him as what he is, a good show, but Ted must make it evident that the show is vaudeville rather than drama. He won't write in this vein:

Two hundred persons last night heard Francis Franner's tenor solos and his political philosophy, as the independent candidate for mayor alternately sang and talked to a rally at Forbes Hall on Sixth Street.

The crowd came to be amused, and was, but it left with an appreciation of Franner's political acumen. When he had entertained the audience until it was applauding vigorously, Franner switched adroitly to his political message and was listened to intently. A comment heard many times as the meeting broke up was, "I thought he was all bluff, but he had some good ideas."

Like most audiences that Franner has spoken to, this one thought he was only a rabble-rouser, but went home with the idea that his methods may be crude but his political doctrines are clear cut.

After the paper carries half a dozen stories in this vein, Franner will address throngs of 1,200 rather than 200 and, regardless of how disquiparant his platform, he will be taken seriously. Why? Because Ted has built him up from a clown to a prophet.

Ted didn't mean to do so, but he became too enthusiastic about the "relief value" of Franner's sideshow and failed to keep it in focus. Keeping it in focus does not mean that only the "established" candidates are to be written about at length, but it does mean that the charlatans are to be held down until they have become genuine political influences.

#### TELL BOTH SIDES

A third danger is in the departure from fairness. Gutter-politician Emanon enlivens a thin speech by accusing his opponent

of most outrageous acts. To anyone at all acquainted with Emanon and with his rival, the falsity of the charges is translucent. Many readers, however, do not know either man, and Emanon's vitriolisms seem quite sensible. Undeniably, they are the most interesting parts of his speech, and the most important, if only because they show how willing Emanon is to swim in the sewer. Ted therefore leads his story with Emanon's accusations.

So far, so good. However, Ted puts on the "tomorrow" list a call upon Emanon's opponent for an answer to the baseless accusations. That is entirely wrong. If Emanon has the paper on Tuesday, and his opponent is not heard until Wednesday, Emanon wins. The twenty-four hours before the opponent can answer will be long enough for Emanon's lies to sink in and impress readers more than they should.

To avoid this, Ted hustles at once to the opponent and asks for an immediate reply to the attack. He is able then to present in one story, both the accusation and the denial:

Alderman John Grady has "sold out" to the "utilities trust," Henry Emanon, his opponent for reelection in Ward 4, declared last night at a rally at Pulaski Hall. Mr. Emanon accused Mr. Grady of accepting \$500 in direct bribes to vote for city ordinances desired by the Gas and Electric Company and said that on March 24 Mr. Grady deposited in the Third National Bank a check for that amount, signed by the Gas and Electric president.

Asked for his explanation, Mr. Grady said that in March he sold the company a right of way for a new transmission line across land he owns at Durwood, in Markham county. He said that the \$500 was in payment for this right of way and that the Markham county register of deeds had recorded the transaction in his official records, which are open to public inspection.

Mr. Emanon, addressing an audience of. . .

At opening glance, Emanon's accusation seems substantiated; he tells even the date of the check Grady received. Grady's explanation, however, is at least equally powerful. To let a day lapse before giving him a chance to defend himself is unfair.

Where was the libel law? On the shelf, collecting dust. Though a false statement is libelous, the fact that it was made at a political rally often gets it into the paper, though a less damaging utterance, made under other circumstances, would be kept out.

Candidates for office are supposed to be thick skinned, but to ask them to waive all the protection of the libel law is unfair. In many cities, however, the understanding is that unless the statement involves direct immorality, it is usable and that the person against whom it was made will accept it as one of the prices of running for office. However, at any time he wishes, a candidate can drop this *laissez faire* and sue the paper for libel. It happens rather often.

Ted, anxious for fierce but clean politics, may find that if he deletes all libelous statements he presents a warped view of the campaign because he pictures it so much cleaner than it is. He believes that he is performing a public service in showing readers just how rotten the battle has become, and he has a fairly good argument for this viewpoint. But his argument is worthless unless he is ambitious enough to present Grady's defense concurrently with Emanon's attack.

Running the attack and the defense in the same story is better than writing each separately. If there are two stories, the defense chronicle, for the sake of coherence, will follow the accusation and be so much a trailer, particularly if the attack makes a half-column or so, that many readers will not reach the answer to the attack. The combination story is much the fairer.

Some newspapers have a copper-riveted rule that no personal attacks will be printed later than the Sunday before election. That prevents a gutter-candidate from issuing on Tuesday, election morning, a *feu d'enfer* so late that the opponent cannot reply. If the attack must be made for the Saturday or Sunday issue, the opponent can answer it on Monday. That one rule reduces, sometimes emphatically, the last-minute mudslinging. A candidate may call attention in the Monday paper to his own virtues, but he may not impugn his rival's character. It is a good rule for Ted to adopt. At first the politicians will complain. Once they see that Ted means it, they stop growling.

In some offices, Ted has a second rule-without-exception: No personal attack of any sort, well founded or patently false, is printed until its subject has an opportunity to reply. An unanswered attack is printed only when the person inveighed against

refuses to answer. This is a splendid rule, though harder to enforce than the "not after Sunday" prohibition.

If Ted is of too lactescent idealism he may propose a complete ban upon personal attacks. This is purity carried too far, because every now and then an attack is so valid that deleting it amounts to an indefensible protecting of a rascal or a crook. Determining the point to which political battles can go when they switch from issues to personalities requires sober and careful judgment.

#### LEVELING-OFF THE CANDIDATES

Mournfully Ted often must write about a candidate much less newswy than his opponent. Republicrat Jackson says as many quotable things in a single speech as Democan Johnson does in a dozen addresses. On a strict news judgment, Jackson's story would run fifteen inches and Johnson's only three. To write them this way would be widely misunderstood; the public would shout that the paper was boosting Jackson. It would lose its reputation for fairness. Accordingly, Ted lets Johnson's weak speeches run to about equal length with Jackson's stronger oratories. The make-up editor protests, but Ted is as a granite rock.

Ted is quick to adjust his news values when an expectedly minor contest begins to run away with the political show. The mayoralty should be the central fight, but the contest for library trustees builds until people talk more about it. Ted will not "needle" the library trusteeship, but he will grant it more space than he had first intended.

How he writes his copy can be a factor in the paper's success in showing its neutrality. The Tuesday paper is thin, twenty pages. Monday night, the Republicrats held six rallies and the Democans seven. Tuesday morning, Ted feels Republicratic and writes that story first. He turns it in at 8:37, when it is still "early copy" and quite safe from copy desk abbreviating. Then he chases a couple of stories. It is 11:05 before he is ready to begin writing about the seven Democan rallies.

"Hey, Ted," the news editor shouts across the room, "the expletive war is spattering all over the place. Keep your stuff

down; we can't handle anything as long as that Republicrat yarn."

The Republicrats had a full column, with many quotes. Ted gives the Democans four paragraphs, with only two quotes. When the paper appears the Democans will be irrefutably convinced that it is maliciously partial to the Republicrats. Ted avoids such unhappinesses in one of two ways. He writes both stories early and turns them in together, or he warns the copy desk that the to-come Democan story will be as long as the Republicrat.

He remembers also what he read on page 112 about treating speeches on controversial subjects.

#### OVERWORKED DICTION

Political writing is dangerous from another standpoint. Politicians so often are of limited vocabulary that, the more Ted's stories reflect the political language, the more they are using over and over the same handful of phrasings. Look at this:

A battle royal is looked for tomorrow when the two old war horses of local Republicratism, George Trent and Oscar Johnson, cross swords in the special election to choose a chairman of the Republicrat city committee to succeed Andrew Harris who died last month.

It is the concensus of opinion of those in the know, politically, that whoever is elected chairman will be his party's standard bearer at the next mayoralty contest, since the present mayor has announced in no uncertain terms that he will not be a candidate for reelection.

Because of the special significance thus attached to the contest for chairman, both Trent and Johnson have been straining every muscle to line up their adherents and have overlooked no bets. Both have been active in promoting their candidacies, and have put on their war paint and are girded for the fray. Today both aspirants said that they were ready for what may be the acid test for them politically and each was confident that victory would crown his banners.

Because of the importance of this contest, it is expected that the membership of the city committee will be present in a body at the meeting tomorrow night at 8 o'clock at the Hotel Warren.

This story is so full of bromides that it reeks like a drugstore. Ted is in perpetual danger of things that approach this specimen

in badness unless he reminds himself frequently that he must write in newspaper rather than in campaign-speech language.

### THREE QUESTION MARKS

Three phenomena mystify Ted at first. During the primary campaign to select the nominees who will finally run for office, the bad Indians numerously are jumping off the reservation. One man after another shouts his independence of the "bosses." When the primary is over, these independents return meekly and support the machine's candidate. All that shouting about independence was only an attempt to upset the local fuehrer, fully expected and no slightest cause for an enduring acrimony. When the challengers found that the boss couldn't be upset, they came back to the organization. The boss expects to be challenged, and the primary is the time for the envious to see if they are strong enough to kick him out. So long as they return immediately after the primary, they are not offenders. Whatever its weaknesses, American politics are good in that they allow a fuehrer to hold his rank only so long as he is the strongest claimant. If someone else can butt him aside, he cannot protest. Ted comes to see that primary-time insurrections do not mean a crumbling of the party masonry.

His next early bafflement has to do with lost-cause candidates. Ted has heard often of Dr. Elmhurst, semiprominent Democan. The soothsayers unanimously predict that "this is a Republicrat year," yet Dr. Elmhurst becomes Democan candidate for mayor. "I don't understand it," Ted muses. "Why, since they admit they're going to be trampled, do the Democans run so prominent a candidate as Dr. Elmhurst? Isn't this the time to put up a weak candidate and save the strong ones until the Republicrat tide is ebbing?"

The explanation is that, for one reason or another, Dr. Elmhurst isn't completely welcome. He has contributed far more than his share of money to the campaign funds, he has made many and powerful speeches, but he does not fit into the hierarchy. Perhaps his religion is wrong, or he can't get along well enough with people, or he is personally *non grata*. Whatever the cause, the machine wants his help but is unwilling to reward him for it.

He has become restive; he asks increasingly often for a chance to be elected to something. "Here," say the fuehrers, "is the time to satisfy the troublesome Dr. Elmhurst. We shall be shellacked anyway this year, so let us make Dr. Elmhurst our candidate. That satisfies him and enables us to keep our really welcome men out of the firing line." Thus the seemingly strong but actually negligible Dr. Elmhurst becomes Democan candidate and is repaid for his help to the party with a check that he can't hock at the political bank.

The third mystery is the fashion in which an independent candidate sometimes is ignored. Republicrats and Democans have nominated their candidates, and the newly formed Citizens' Non-partisan Reform Association announces a "sticker" candidate for mayor, a man whose name is not printed on the ballot and must be written in by anyone wishing to vote for him. The reform candidate is of eminent, unarguable ability, and he exposes convincingly the rottenness of Republicrat and Democan machines. "Time for a house-cleaning," Ted assures himself. "This independent looks strong." But the bosses are nonchalant. Ted asks the city editor, who answers with one word: "Organization." The Republicrats and the Democans have it, the purist hasn't. He looks good and he sounds good, but the careful, thorough party organizations, reaching into each block in each precinct, will corral the votes.

Now and then, of course, the independent does win, but ordinarily he is so handicapped by lack of a political organization, that is, machine, that his manifestly superior caliber has no chance to bring more than a scattering of votes.

### THE RACIAL SLANT

Aflame to explain, Ted may overdo one bit of simplifying. Politicians talk loudly about "racial groups," and explain that Mr. Murphy is on the ticket in order to capture the Irish vote, Mr. Bergeron to corral the French, Mr. Amoroso to attract the Italian, and Mr. Kriviatski to appeal to the Polish. Unless he watches himself, Ted interprets every ticket as arranged solely for its ethnological allure. Ultimately he writes about the candidate whose job is to entice the "American vote." Overdoing

the racial-group thesis is socially harmful because its psychology tends to keep these population fragments separate, and probably hostile, instead of aiding in their assimilation into an all-American public. Race groups are encouraged to vote on old-country names rather than on issues. Worse, the racial elements tend to divide again, on religious lines, until a campaign becomes actually though tacitly Protestant *vs.* Catholic. Ted had better learn that Mr. Schmidt might have been put on the ticket because he was a worthy candidate rather than as an appeal to the German vote.

Before the primaries, Ted feels like a kite-string. Candidates and potential candidates are frequent in carefully-loopholed suggestions of policy and issues. These trial balloons are attempts to find out the public reaction. Mr. Gunderson, gunning for the Republicrat nomination for alderman from Ward 2, talks a day or so about eliminating grade crossings, and then says no more about them. He found the public uninterested in grade crossings and began hunting for a hotter-sparking issue. Ted rebels at having one story after another thrust at him and growls, "Why do I have to do the guinea-pigging for the politicians?" True, they are "using" him, but in doing so they are helping shape the issues for the forthcoming campaign. They are stirring public interest in the campaign, and any legitimate means of doing this is a benefit because the more interested the public becomes, the more of its members will go to the polls and the more representative of the entire population the balloting will be.

#### DON'T BE A CYNIC

Still harder for Ted to swallow is the use of slogans. Each party and each candidate tries to express its philosophy in a catchy epigram: "Work and wages," "All-American Anderson," "Win with Winslow," "Lower taxes and bigger payrolls." Sloganeering has been abused, and is used to stir emotion as a substitute for analysis of the real issues of a campaign.

Yet it and all the other abuses are not enough to justify Ted in becoming cynical. If Ted will remember the means whereby Herr Hitler, Signor Mussolini, and Comrade Stalin obtained and retained their power, he will agree that whatever its abuses, the American system is infinitely preferable. American "dictators"



are encouragingly short-lived. Curley of Massachusetts, Pendergast of Kansas City, even Hague of Jersey City, to pick three at random, all have failed in their attempts to be fuehrers. Emotion and prejudice sometimes ride high in the political parade, but at its most odorous worst the American process has been a hundred times less destructive than the Nazi, the Fascist, or the Communist. We Americans elect many a rogue and many a fool, but we have kept the power of "unelecting" them, and surprisingly often we do "unelect" them. Bad as our system sometimes is, it has never produced a fuehrer or a duce. For Ted to be of Missouri ancestry and everlastingly suspicious is splendid; he will not be hoodwinked and imposed upon. For him to be muriatic and to see the political machinations as insufferably bad is short-sighted and leads him to giving the paper's readers such a jaundiced picture of politics that they stay away from the polls instead of doing their part to get rid of the rotten and to retain or obtain the good.

Ted must also keep his mind as open as the fields when he's writing county politics, because his story will have readers in a larger territory, and those readers will include town and rural people as well as city folk. He must remember that Ed Hayes, who raised a sprouting good potato crop last year on his 120 acres just this side of the county line, is as interested in the speeches of Joe's boy as candidate for sheriff, as Hugh Bankman, department store head, is in Centerville's candidate. Ted is perplexed at the Democan favor shown by the folk in the county's southeast corner, for they've always voted Republicrat. He looks up the life history of each candidate and finds that the Democan listed on the ballot for county sheriff was once postmaster of Hillside in the southeast district. The Republicrat candidate lives in Green City. Thus, a "city *vs.* town" feeling may dim or replace an ordinarily "Republicrat *vs.* Democan" controversy in county politics.

The political convention, whether county or state, does not bother Ted a great deal if he works on an afternoon paper. The final edition is gone before the convention day is well developed. If he is on a morning paper, the convention troubles him more, especially if it has spirited contests. The nominating and second-

ing speeches are terribly long-winded, and delay the voting until embarrassingly late. Nobody enjoys those speeches, but they are various delegates' only way of having a few minutes of prominence about which they can boast when they return home. Handling the speeches means a running story, discussed in the chapters on speech reporting. Reporting the voting accurately is largely a matter of machinery. Earlier in the day Ted obtained from the convention officials a complete and alphabetical list of delegates and of their districts. When the presiding officer calls for the vote in favor, a shout arises; when he asks for those opposed, another shout, quite as vigorous. He then polls the delegates, with each delegate or the spokesman for each group of delegates rising and telling his vote. Ted simply checks off one after another: Adams County, 9 for Dayton, 2 for Whipple, none for Kingman; Ashland County, 4 for Dayton, 7 for Whipple, 4 for Kingman; Berkeley County, 2 for Dayton, 7 for Whipple, 4 for Kingman. Checking his list as the vote is reported keeps him always up to date with the count.

The real job is to get the speeches and the votes into the office. Ted is given ample assistance. Other reporters, working under his instructions, take each fragment of information as he scribbles it out and hustle it to a telephone, an instrument located well in advance and held faithfully by another assistant so that it is always at the paper's service. If Ted tried to do the whole job himself he would be sunk; he would be away from the convention floor half the time, or he would get information to the office only when the session was over, which might be too late.

When the minutes before edition time are few and short, Ted is tempted to establish a trend in the voting and from it predict the final result, which may not be available until the edition has gone. The convention has 678 delegates, and at the halfway mark Dayton has 162, Kingman 93, and Whipple 84.

Dayton's impressive lead seems safe, and Ted begins scrawling a "Lead Convention":

Homer W. Dayton, Junctionville, early this morning won the Republicrat state convention preprimary indorsement for governor, running well ahead of Andrew T. Kingman and William Whipple. As the voting proceeded, Dayton took an early lead,

with more votes than both his rivals combined. This lead was too great for Kingman and Whipple to overcome.

"Nice enough," Ted thinks. "Even if Kingman and Whipple pick up toward the end, my lead covers them." But it may not be nice enough; many a convention vote has started in one direction and ended in another. Ted had better run no risks. The number of votes is small enough that a few delegates who change their minds can upset a candidate who seemed safely in front.

"Too cautious," Ted objects. "Why, even in a presidential election, the Associated Press and the *New York Herald Tribune* tell who won long before the vote is completed, let alone counted." Ted forgets that the AP and *H-T* analysts are of far more experience than he is, and he has overlooked that they predict only when a candidate is so far in the lead that the laws of simultaneous equations must crumble before he could be defeated in a last-minute swing. He overlooks that the AP and *H-T* experts have put months and many, many dollars into tapping various sections of the country and finding out where the trend is strongly Republican or Democan and where the drift is about even.

The Democans, let us say, are well ahead in New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Illinois, and Ohio, all populous states. Thinly populated Utah, Wyoming, Arizona, and New Mexico have sent in only a few scattering returns. The Pennsylvania figures give the Republican 165,000 and the Democan 310,000; Nevada gives the Republican 2,550 and the Democan 1,100. No matter how ardently Nevada goes Republican it cannot overcome the Democan lead in Pennsylvania. When the *H-T* observer is confident that the Pennsylvania trend is safe he can ignore three or four smaller states; even if they all went completely opposite to the Pennsylvania vote, the candidate who carried Pennsylvania would be ahead.

Ted also fails to notice that the AP and the *H-T* are much more hesitant in predicting about a state than about a national contest; the smaller the number of votes involved, the riskier the projection of partial returns. For Ted to forecast on incomplete returns is extremely perilous, until he is such a seasoned analyst that he can predict accurately how each precinct in a city election and each county in a state voting will go. It takes more than one

or two campaigns before he is so seasoned. Until that time, he plays it safe:

With half the vote counted, the Republicrat led by 5,211 to 4,106, but too many precincts were yet to be reported for the final result to be certain.

This may deflate Ted's ego but it prevents the Wednesday morning paper from shouting "Andrews Elected" and the Thursday's issue from explaining with blushes that "Wheeler overcame Andrews's early lead, to win by less than 500 votes."

#### JUST BEFORE THE BATTLE

The final days before election put Ted under pressure. Each party chairman prates at top-voice about the assured victory of his candidate, but Ted knows that the Democan will win by a 5 to 3 margin. Ted is really confident of it; privately, the Republicrat chairman already concedes it, despite his "We'll carry every town in the state" puffings. Ted would like to write a forecast story saying that the Democan will win. That would establish his prophetic prestige. Also it might appreciably affect the election. Democans might say, "Why bother to vote? Our man is as good as elected." If enough Democans took this view and failed to vote, the Republicrat might win, undeservingly. While this situation would apply more often to a municipal than a state contest, it would be equally reprehensible anywhere. Ted uses his stories to inform readers, but not to play upon them so that they neglect voting and thereby allow a minority candidate to be elected. The editorial page argues for one side or the other, but its proselyting is open and evident and hence can be resisted; bias in the news columns, however innocent in purpose, may not be recognized and hence may affect the public strongly.

Ted may forecast a great gain in Democan strength, but he will not forecast it in such a way that either Democans or Republicrats neglect voting. The specimens that follow show, first, the offensive story and, second, the acceptable forecast:

Howard W. Bremer, Republicrat, will be the city's next mayor. This became evident today when an analysis of the political situation showed that he will win in four of the six wards. He will

carry wards 1, 2, 4, and 5 heavily enough to more than offset the lead which his Democan opponent, Kenneth F. Young, will have in wards 3 and 6.

Howard W. Bremer, Republicrat candidate for mayor, will make a stronger showing than did his party's nominees in the last three municipal elections. Republicrat gains in wards 1, 2, 4, and 5 are undeniable, but Kenneth F. Young, Democan, almost certainly will win in wards 3 and 6. Whether Bremer's expected lead in the other wards will be great enough to overcome Young's margin in wards 3 and 6 will determine the election.

### ELECTION DAY

Finally election day comes. It isn't up to the ballyhoo. For a few people inside the morning newspaper office it means frightful work; everyone else yawns and strolls out for a cup of coffee. In the afternoon paper office, voting day is no severe strain.

The morning paper must prepare both stories and tabulations showing how each precinct voted. The statistics are arranged in advance with everything complete except for filling in the figures. This is done by a corps from the bookkeeping and reporting departments, directed by someone who has ridden herd on a half-dozen elections. The system is the same every year; the same tables are prepared. As a precinct is reported, the figures are given to the statisticians who fit them into the appropriate tables.

During voting hours Ted rambled among the polling places to pick up colorful bits for a "sidelight" story. He had found out previously at what time the mayor would vote, and had a photographer on hand to get a picture. If he knew of other interesting bits, such as the time Albion Gordon, 102, would appear at the polls, Ted was on hand or had an aide there. Part of the afternoon he spent at party headquarters, picking up feature bits and seeing how the opposing machines went about "getting out the vote." The more he knows the political ramparts, the more advance arrangements he can make to bring in the human side of election.

Ted himself spends most of the evening in the office. He makes frequent trips to the statistical staff to find out whether Precinct C of Ward 2 went Democan by the expected margin. Shortly before edition time, he writes his stories, based on the figures

given him by the counting staff. Usually he has a roundup or summary story, and a separate chronicle for each major contest. A typical list for a state election would be this:

1. Roundup telling whether the city and environs went Democan or Republicrat.
2. Story on how the city and its region voted on the governorship.
3. Story on how the city and its region voted on congressional contests.
4. Roundup on the purely municipal contests.
5. Story on the mayoralty.

If other contests are outstanding, they also have separate stories. Thus Ted makes the typewriter smoke when finally he begins pounding out his copy. If there are too many stories for one man to handle, he parcels them out among assistants who write under his direction. What he, and they, write goes to the copy desk in fragments, and Ted is particularly careful that each chunk of story be labeled or slugged meticulously. Probably he assigns sluglines to each story early in the evening, and informs the copy desk of these slugs, so that when the story marked "State" begins to appear no editor will mistake this roundup for the "Gov." chronicle. He marks each fragment "Proof to Ted" so that he knows what already is in type and need not rely entirely on memory when deciding where a new bit of information should be inserted or where to look for a paragraph that now needs killing.

Ted wastes no time hanging around polling booths to pick up statistics. That is done by messengers, one at each precinct. As soon as a figure is released the messenger brings or telephones it to the office. When the returns begin to be decisive, Ted goes himself or sends a deputy to party headquarters to get statements from the victorious and the defeated candidates.

On an evening paper, Ted's work is simpler. Few returns will be available when the editions roll; perhaps none, for state law in some places forbids releasing early returns and commands that a precinct wait until it can make its final and complete report. Ted circulates in party headquarters and polling places to find

out whether the voting is heavy or light. The extent of the voting is likely to be his story, since few if any figures will be available.

He will not need as many stories as does his morning-paper colleague. A single roundup is likely to be enough. If he wants more, he prepares a review story for the principal contests, telling what the issues and personalities are. If he gets an occasional early figure, he runs it as a prelude:

Sherman led Whitcomb, 27 to 19, when Precinct B of Ward 3 reported its first block of 50 votes in the district attorney contest. Four ballots were blank.

District Attorney William H. Sherman, Republican, seeking reelection, was opposed today by Elihu Whitcomb, Democrat, in a contest that has been the most bitter of any in this campaign. Each candidate has been vehement in attacking his opponent.

Mr. Sherman, now finishing his second term, has. . . .

Elections are much more exciting to the layman than to Ted. The local radio station has brought a portable microphone to the newspaper office to get an on-the-spot broadcast. Nothing is happening. The radio man totes the "mike" to the telegraph room and picks up the clatter of the teleprinters. Still no more votes reported, and he has run out of chatter. Desperately he *ad libs* with his assistant, both tearing paper noisily and scrunching their shoes to give sound effects as of intense excitement. Ted passes by, on his way out for a cup of coffee.

"They're adding up a bunch of votes," the radio man declaims, ripping another wad of paper. "We'll have the figures for you in a moment."

"Look at this," his assistant breaks in with well-simulated breathlessness. "Here's a dispatch from Montana."

The announcer reads it excitedly. "In the Montana gubernatorial contest, 48 precincts give Olson, Republican, 405 and Smithers, Democrat, 306. We'll have more figures for you in a moment." Another ripping of paper.

Ted smiles. Poor devils, the radio gang has to make it seem exciting even though everyone in the office knows that it may be half an hour before a new batch of figures comes in. "Shall I bring you some coffee?" Ted asks meekly. The radio man turns well away from the microphone. "You go to blazes," he snorts.

LABOR NEWS

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## MR. HOGAN IS SUSPICIOUS

EITHER PAUL IS IN LUCK or he has been given the meanest job on the paper: the labor run.

In some cities "writing labor" is as good as doing city hall; the reporter is a welcome and respected visitor to Central Labor Union Hall and the union chieftains are among his personal friends. In other towns he works among enemies, ever suspicious and sometimes intolerant. Let us pitch Paul into a city where the labor beat is agony.

When Paul goes to C.L.U. Hall and introduces himself as "from the *Chronicle*," he will be told, "Get the malediction out of here." He faces one of the hardest "selling jobs" in newspapering. Not only must he convince the labor men that he personally is honest, but, even more difficult, he must make them see that the paper is of equal integrity.

"But we want your news," he pleads.

"Yeah," scoffs the C.L.U. secretary, "and Santa Claus comes in July. I know Colonel Coulter; he's a smart publisher, always makes money, but the only time he lets the *Chronicle* say anything about us is when he can give us a black eye."

Secretary Hogan has a sincere, though mistaken, basis for his grouch. It began years ago, when he was one of the younger labor leaders. The city, as a whole, was unorganized and non-union craftsmen equaled or outnumbered those with membership cards. The unions, though almost all were affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, were individualistic rather than clannish. The Typos didn't think much of the Building Trades



men, who, in turn, sometimes saw more shortcomings than virtues in the Carpenters. All the unions belonged to one big family, with quite as much quarreling as in most large families. C.L.U. Hall was more a social than a business gathering place. In ordinary times, labor news ran light and gathering it was distinctly a part-time job. "We didn't get the attention we deserved," Mr. Hogan complains now. He's right. Because organized labor was so frequently a minority group, it was slighted, not from malice but from real though errant belief that its day-to-day importance was low.

Mr. Hogan, however, did very little to show the labor reporter that the beat was being undervalued. Mr. Hogan and his associates were suspicious of the reporter and usually insisted, "No news here." What they meant was, "No superlative news here today"; they did not realize that the ordinary routine of labor affairs can be news. Nor did the reporter realize it actively enough. That the president of the Carpenters went to the capital city to confer with the president of the state federation seemed to Mr. Hogan entirely within the labor family; he did not appreciate that it would interest outsiders.

Accordingly, the reporter got little news except when trouble was at hand or was blowing up. A factory was struck. Pickets and police, wild talk, and finally a scuffle. Patrolmen rushed up, night sticks whirled, men jostled and cursed, someone fell, bleeding. The patrol wagon clattered around the corner; officers pushed a dozen protesting men into it.

Then the reporter appeared. "What's it all about?" Excited, angry, perhaps bewildered, the labor chiefs were too busy managing their own men to bother with an outsider. "Get the devil out of here." When the paper appeared, it told the factory management's version of the strike, the violence was detailed at length, but there was little if anything of the union's side of the story.

Next day saw no trouble. The reporter came around, but no one thought to give him an explanation of the union's position. For four days, nothing happened. The reporter hunted new ways of saying, "The strike at the Ellis plant continued quietly this morning." What the reporter learned about mediation or arbi-

tration came largely from the management; the union heads just wouldn't talk. The story drooped to two paragraphs.

On the sixth day, someone threw a brick. It knocked out a policeman. Again night sticks whirled and the patrol wagon clattered around the corner. The story ran half a column, page 1. The seventh day was drab and the story shrank again.

Mr. Hogan meanwhile built up the thesis that a labor story is prominent only when it is a story of strife. A shrewd organizer, he was not a shrewd enough publicity man to realize that a reporter who has little to say writes less than one who has much information to recount. Mr. Hogan didn't supply or make available the information that would have accelerated the dull-day stories.

When the strike was settled, the story lifted to page 1 again. Some strikes were victories for the unions, but enough were defeats for Mr. Hogan, already sharply critical, to believe that the lost strike received a much better play than did the winning walkout.

After three or four strikes, with the longer stories coming always on days when there was violence—that is, something to write about—Mr. Hogan was convinced that the newspaper was ardent to present the cause of labor disparagingly. Management wasn't so taciturn; it sometimes issued statements and gave explanations.

Mr. Hogan protests that several times he prepared statements but the newspaper either cut them down enormously or refused entirely to run them. One statement, reasonably typical, made 750 words. It announced the annual C.L.U. clambake, 150 words, and then told in flaming, crusading language how the C.L.U. alone stood between the downtrodden workman and a Simon Legree employer. It wasn't a history or even an explanation of the C.L.U.; it was a sales talk, a membership drive. The copy desk simply couldn't see wherein the 600 words of campaign copy were needful to the clambake announcement.

Again, Mr. Hogan issued an explanation of the union's version of a walkout, but he loaded it with personal attacks, vitriol strong, upon the factory managers. He attacked more than he

explained. The copy desk, knowing that under the libel law the newspaper would be responsible if the overhot statements caused a lawsuit, edited out the invective. Mr. Hogan, unconcerned about the libel law, saw in that editing only irrefutable evidence of the newspaper's partiality.

Don't blame Mr. Hogan. He was not a trained publicity or public relations man. His chief failure was in treating the reporter as an enemy instead of a friend.

Now, when Paul comes to C.L.U. Hall, Mr. Hogan views him as a viper.

### THE NEW SITUATION

Labor's situation has changed immensely since Mr. Hogan was young in the union movement. Unions more commonly than not have a heavy majority of the city's workers. Legal impediments to organization have been removed. The unions are much more aware of their interrelationships than they used to be. But Mr. Hogan's prejudices, partly founded and partly imaginary, persist. To some extent they are heightened by a psychological carryover from the days when unions were fewer, smaller, and much more "on trial" than they are now. When an individual or a group believes that he or it is on the defensive, every statement is suspect and the most factual declaration, such as "Only 50 of the 250 who struck have been reemployed," seems to be made maliciously, solely to emphasize how badly the union was licked.

Actually, the newspaper is much more likely to favor than to oppose the union. The men who write and edit the news are warmly sympathetic to the underdog and in the ordinary labor dispute the employees seem to be the underdogs. "Sure," Mr. Hogan admits, "but the reporters and editors have to slant their stuff to please the boss." Newspaper publishers probably are less antagonistic to unions than are any other employers except possibly the railroad executives. The publishers and the railroaders have dealt with unions for years and years, they know how to get along with the unions, they have come to know the unions and their ways, and have learned from experience what are the

benefits as well as the disadvantages of a unionized plant. They know, for example, that a man who can show an I.T.U. card can run a linotype; he doesn't have to prove it, for he wouldn't have the card if he couldn't meet a specified standard. A nonunion compositor may be as good as he claims; the only way to find out is to test him. The employers have learned also that when they sign a contract for three years, they have three years in which they will not be faced unexpectedly with a demand for "Fifteen per cent more or we quit."

Because for years they have found themselves able to get along with unions happily and prosperously, publishers have little of the fear and distrust that marks employers in other fields who never had unions in their plants until a few years ago when Federal law forbade an employer to prohibit organization. The pressure upon reporters to color and doctor labor news is mostly a myth; for every one office where the reporter is supposed to warp his writings, there are 100 in which he is supposed not to.

This writer, for example, has worked on a paper where a state labor federation convention attacked the publisher as "unfair," and the story was the lead on page 1 with every word of the denunciation printed, for all that some of it swerved toward the scurrilous. The story was the lead by direct order of the publisher; he didn't want anyone to be able to say that the paper played down news it found unpalatable.

But Mr. Hogan doesn't realize this. It is up to Paul to convince him that the *Chronicle* genuinely wants labor news and will treat it fairly. Paul has another missionary work to perform with and upon Mr. Hogan. It is to show Mr. Hogan that what he says in confidence to a reporter remains in confidence. Because his contacts with newspaper men were infrequent until recent years, Mr. Hogan has not learned how to deal with them. Especially is this true if the city is small, for the labor reporter had three or four other beats to cover and gave C.L.U. Hall only a little of his time. Mr. Hogan never saw him long enough to become thoroughly acquainted, and therefore Mr. Hogan's suspicions had little chance for erosion. In the large city, labor was more likely to be or to approach a full-time beat and the reporter had more chance to hobnob.

## PAUL TURNS MISSIONARY

Paul hangs around C.L.U. Hall as much as he can, even on his own rather than the paper's time. His first work is to get Mr. Hogan and the other labor men to trust him personally. He may never win them into liking the *Chronicle*. He will discover this the first time he takes a vacation, for while he is gone the paper will be without labor news. Mr. Hogan and his associates will not talk to the substitute reporter; they won't admit even that eleven o'clock is later than ten o'clock. To Paul they will give information, but to no one else. The city editor realizes this. It means that if Paul develops the labor beat, he can keep it as long as he wishes, simply because it would take a successor so long to reestablish the contacts that snapped when Paul gave up the run.

Convinced that Paul is "okay," the labor chiefs will volunteer any quantity of information. Paul will not have to chase the news; it will be delivered to him, so long as he visits C.L.U. Hall often enough for the union men to remain acquainted with him. This is one of the happier sides of labor reporting; Paul won't need to fear missing a story, for his union friends won't let him miss one.

How does he go about winning their confidence? First, he makes no attempt to cover C.L.U. Hall in the same way that he would the city clerk's office, dropping in at about the same hour each day, asking a handful of questions, and moving on to his next stop. Instead, he lingers, and lingers, and lingers. Second, he does not expect to get "inside information" at the start. Accordingly, he shows appreciation for routine news. Two of the Plumbers' apprentices have completed their probation and are advanced to craftsmen. Paul writes a three-paragraph story about this; a lead, and a biographical paragraph about each man. He explains to the news editor that if some of these lesser stories are treated appreciatively, he will be in a much better position later to get more important news.

"Twenty-four point headline on this?" the news editor asks.

"I'd like it; it'll help me to stand in with those hard cookies down at the C.L.U."

"All right, Paul, but I'll have to pray twice as loud tonight to keep my conscience quiet."

Paul's conscience will be quiet enough next day when he visits C.L.U. Hall. Mr. Hogan didn't expect the apprentices item to be in the paper at all, let alone to have a modest prominence. He still thinks it was an accident. A day or so later he finds another speck of news. It, too, is printed appreciatively. When this happens often enough, Mr. Hogan softens. Maybe this Paul fellow is all right, after all. Eventually Mr. Hogan says more than he intended, and asks that some of his remarks be regarded as confidential. Paul agrees and Mr. Hogan begins to realize that a reporter's promise is as good as his own.

The word is whispered about that Paul is "all right." Mr. Hogan and the leaders of the individual unions talk to him more and more freely; they give him behind-the-scenes information, some usable and some in confidence, unprintable but helping him understand the labor situation. He begins to appreciate that a labor union is anything but a pure democracy, for all the talk about "common interests." It is an oligarchy, perhaps even a despotism, with a half-fistful of men deciding what to do and, one fashion or another, persuading the rank and file to accept these decisions. He discovers that selfishness and self-interest are as rampant at C.L.U. Hall as anywhere else. Why not? Is a man less subject to greed simply because he has a union card in his pocket?

All this development requires time; Paul will not within a fortnight become one of Mr. Hogan's confidants.

#### ROUTINE NEWS

The day-by-day labor grist is interesting rather than exciting. As with the city hall, Paul must know the "inside" so well that he can anticipate news. For instance, he knows when the wage-contract between a union and an employer will expire, and thus is awake to follow the inevitable negotiations for a new contract and bring them into print if they are newsworthy. He knows when union elections are scheduled, when to learn about periodical reports of membership, and where to ask about the work of the union-label committee, active in fostering such demand for

union-made goods that employers are eager to have their products carry the union insignia prominently. He knows of the goings and comings of union executives, so that he can tell about their conferences and powwows.

Little of this news is spectacular. That the Metal Trades Council wishes new contracts with employers to carry revised stipulations as to the number of apprentices to be allowed will rarely make page 1, but almost always it is a substantial inside-page story. Paul must work rapidly out of the state of mind that labor news is dull unless it is explosive. The belief that only bad news is good news is a central reason why Mr. Hogan's complaints against the newspapers have some validity. It isn't a matter of dishonesty in news, but of shortsightedness.

"Personal items" will not be regarded highly by the copy desk in a large city but in the smaller town they are excellent. That two Typo apprentices have passed their union proficiency examinations is good copy, because an appreciable number of readers know one or both youths. Where Paul has a regularly recurrent "labor column," appearing say on Tuesdays and Fridays, he can use these personals nicely. A story or two of several paragraphs in length and a half column of personals give him a good offering.

Who reads labor news? That depends on how interesting it is. Everyone reads it when trouble is coming; in other times, the labor men themselves are its most faithful but not its only readers. That the three-chair Henderson barber shop, 1415 Ohio Street, has been unionized is a good little item. All its patrons, union and unorganized, will read it. So will many small-shop proprietors. That not one member of the Truck Drivers' union was in even a minor traffic accident last month is highly readable; every motorist will find it interesting, for all that the 1925 notion of a truck driver as a fellow who can fill a four-lane highway with a half-ton truck has been generally dissipated now. Certainly there is nothing exclamatory in the "go any time" story about union members who are plugging away at night school as they prepare to become attorneys or accountants, but a "success story" never lacks readers.

These unexciting chronicles have distinct social and sociological

value, for they fill out the picture of labor. Many readers think of "labor" as synonymous with "higher pay and fewer hours"; to learn that labor means also individuals and groups of individuals whose actions, desires, successes, and failures are as "human" as their own will be enlighteningly valuable. How many readers know, for example, of the sickness and accident protections that some unions offer, or of the provisions to care for aging members?

This is not to say for an instant that Paul becomes a labor propagandist. He simply tells the paper's readers *all* the things labor is doing, rather than only the detonating things. He uses few or no adjectives in this telling. Readers are entirely free to decide, "Those union fellows are on the right track" or "Somebody ought to take a reef in that union's sails." The point is that labor news, spot and feature or semifeature, is available in excellent quantity if Paul goes after it hard enough.

Now, as in so many other facets of reporting, Paul must throw off any drift to cynicism. Here is a business agent, often the Hitler of unionism, who sells out his men for his own gain. "They're all like that," Paul sniffs. They're not; over there is a business agent who kept the wage scale from nosediving during the depression, who is genuinely "Pop" to his men. Here is a union president who manufactures trouble when employee-employer relations are too calm. "Flannelmouthed agitators, every one of them." Not at all so; over there is a president who in fifteen years has never even spoken of a strike, let alone urged one. Unionism should be a delectable brotherhood; that it has the usual human frailty does not warrant Paul in assuming that the greedy and avaricious are all-dominant here any more than in another field. He wouldn't deny the self-sacrifice of many ministers simply because he knows of two or three who married widows for their money rather than their love. Why hold unions to an impossibly high criterion?

#### A.F. of L. *vs.* C.I.O.

Paul has today two difficulties that his predecessor of a decade ago escaped. One is the war between the A.F. of L. and its



secessionist son, the C.I.O. Civil war always is the most bitter and cruel, and this civil war is true to form. Closely in touch with both factions, Paul cannot escape strong personal beliefs as to which one is dead wrong, but he will keep those beliefs from showing in any of his writings. Probably he won't let even his close friends in the unions know what are his views. Consider this specimen:

Another blow was struck last night against the dominance of the A.F. of L. in local labor affairs when the Bus Drivers' union, which has a membership of 125 and is regarded as one of the strongest unions in the city, refused to honor an arbitrary order from William A. Peters, state A.F. of L. president, to compel its president, Emory Brush, either to withdraw from the C.I.O., or to give up his A.F. of L. membership.

By a vote of 91 to 26, the local union adopted a resolution for democracy and autonomy in local affairs, allowing Mr. Brush to act without restriction. He has been helping the C.I.O. membership campaign at the Ellis factory, which is now being organized for the first time.

The action last night was not a surprise as many predictions had been heard that the bus drivers would not accept dictation from outside their own ranks.

The prejudice in this writing is so obvious that every A.F. of L. supporter will be convinced that the paper has "sold out" to the C.I.O. Changing a few words would make the story manifestly neutral. In the first paragraph, "an arbitrary order" is too strong, because "arbitrary" has one meaning in the dictionary and another in people's minds. "A direct order" would avoid the fuehrer connotation. The second paragraph offers "a resolution for democracy and autonomy." Whether it was democracy or bolshevism depends upon the reader's personal viewpoint; as presented here, the newspaper is accepting the resolution as genuinely democratic. Fairness would be served better by such a phrasing as "a resolution described by its sponsors as making for democracy and autonomy in local affairs." In the last paragraph, "dictation" is offensive, because it has escaped its dictionary meaning and is regarded commonly as "dictatorial" or "Hitleresque." An impartial phrasing would be "orders."

Paul can slip as easily into being an A.F. of L. booster:

The A.F. of L. in the last three years has conducted four strikes in this city, all of them peaceful and without violence, and all resulting in substantial gains for labor. The C.I.O., on the other hand, has pulled 23 strikes. Bloodshed and disturbances marked almost all of them and in only one was any noticeable success scored.

"On the other hand" and "pulled" are extremely prejudicial. Whether all four A.F. of L. walkouts achieved "substantial" gains is a matter of definition, and the reporter didn't define the word. How many C.I.O. strikes had to be attended by rioting before it could be said that "almost all" had commotion and turmoil as concomitants? Paul will find parallel syntax an excellent device for being neutral and, even more important, for showing that neutrality:

Membership figures for the past two years follow:

Last year, 12 A.F. of L. unions with 604 members, a decline of 35 members; 10 C.I.O. unions with 656 members, a gain of 143 members. This year, 13 A.F. of L. unions with 663 members, a gain of 59 members; 11 C.I.O. unions with 579 members, a decline of 77 members.

No one can say where the reporter's sympathies were, for each faction was described in completely parallel form.

Paul's second complication is that of his own possible union membership. If he is in the American Newspaper Guild, he is a C.I.O. member and A.F. of L. men may tell him frostily that the charter hadn't been on the wall long enough for the sun to begin fading it before the Guild transferred from the A.F. of L. to the C.I.O. If he belongs to the A.F. of L. news union, the C.I.O. men may sneer at him as being in an outfit "thrown together" to try to save face after the Guild joined the C.I.O. Paul doesn't flaunt his own affiliations in the faces of members of the other faction.

#### MAKE NEUTRALITY MANIFEST

When a strike comes, Paul must make it unmistakably evident that he is a neutral observer. Whatever management says about the union, or the union about the management, must be shown

to the other side and an opportunity given to answer the complaint. If the other side is clammish, Paul's story tells specifically who refused to reply and what his explanation was for refusing. Unless this is in the story, partisans will say that Paul didn't give the side that was attacked an opportunity to defend itself. Paul will keep himself in evidence at C.L.U. Hall and at the strike scene, so that no one can say that he "spent three hours listening to the company and didn't take more than five minutes hearing our side of it." He will not compromise his independence by suggesting that he has ears for only the strikers' arguments; he will let it be known that he is visiting the management as well as the union chiefs.

He does very well to emphasize straight reporting and to minimize color writing. Tempers and emotions are on the flood tide and color writing too readily can be interpreted as biased.

A chorus of curses and imprecations rose when General Manager Torbie appeared. Cries of "kill him" and "smear him" filled the air as the crowd of more than 1,500 watched him enter the factory, preceded and followed by a police guard.

Notice the "Cries of 'kill him' " sentence; it suggests that all the 1,500 persons joined in bloodthirsty yells. No, it doesn't say that, but it gives the idea strongly. If some thirty-five louts shouted their throats raw and the 1,465 other persons in the crowd remained silent, the impression the sentence makes is woefully inaccurate and has the effect of downright bias.

Paul's first strike will be extremely difficult reporting; he must submerge his sympathies and everlastingly he must scrutinize each word to make triply certain that its impact is as fully accurate as its congealed dictionary meaning. Anyone who has seen a strike at close range knows how difficult it is to describe in focus; stirring little episodes tell themselves so vividly that they seem monstrous large events. Paul does not gloss bad acting; if nine persons were battered in a riot, he says so and directly, but he realizes that the emotional strain of a strike does things to a reporter's vocabulary. Therefore, he underwrites and says it in low rather than loud voice.

Recapitulating, the labor beat puts these burdens upon Paul:

1. He must premeditatedly and protractedly win the confidence of the labor chiefs. When he has done so, they will bring him all the information he can print.
2. He plows the beat as thoroughly during quiet as during strike times.
3. He not only is neutral, but makes his stories show that neutrality.
4. He sidesteps cynicism.
5. When the news is incandescent, he tells it quietly rather than in a shout.

BUSINESS NEWS

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## THE OPPORTUNITY RUN

HARRY GETS more important-looking mail than anyone else in the office, including the editor in chief. Long envelopes of expensive paper with return addresses in raised letters come by the dozen. Surely, for Harry is the business reporter. When he took over the run it wasn't much of a beat; it yielded two or three stories a fortnight. Now it gives Harry two or three stories a day, and many, many luncheons at which the other fellow pays the check.

In the metropolitan papers the business beat is prized; in smaller cities it often is neglected. That was why Harry's success in developing it made him one of the staff's major leaguers. He was still a damp-chinned cub when the city editor gave him the business beat, as part of the experimenting to find out Harry's caliber. Harry was smart enough to see that here was large-lettered opportunity. The publisher as well as the city editor noticed that the city's business was being recorded much more thoroughly than ever before and when Harry asked for three days off for a trip to Chicago, the city editor said crisply, "We'll make it worth your while to turn down that other job."

Where the business beat is impoverished and starveling, it is so because of two deficiencies in journalistic vitamins:

1. The reporter never learned how to manage businessmen. He could talk with schoolteachers, city councilmen, and police captains, but he was afraid of businessmen, because their work is full of dollar signs.
2. He never learned enough about business to be able to ex-

plain it interestingly. It has its own language, which he knew so skimpily that he dared not translate it. As a result only the "initiated" could follow, let alone enjoy, his stories.

Businessmen aren't fire-eaters. Scared as the reporter is of the man who directs a factory employing 1,000 men, that general manager is even more frightened of the reporter. The general manager realizes that a newspaper is an enormous manufacturing plant, turning out a dishearteningly large and complicated product in heretically short time. The first of the staff goes to work at 7 in the morning and by noon a thirty-two page paper appears, with 115,000 words of reading matter—enough for a husky novel—and about a square acre of advertisements of most manifest manufacturing intricacy. By 4 o'clock the paper has been revised for two or three or four later editions, so that the copy the general manager buys on his way home is vastly different from the one he scanned at lunch. "There," he tells himself, "is efficiency. Those fellows know how to get things done."

Today a reporter visited him at 11:30. The reporter was brisk enough, but in no perspiring hurry. He even took time to chat about the Wilbar Country Club golf links. What the general manager told him ran at full-column length in this afternoon's paper. "Merciful days, how did he do it?" the general manager asks. "That's a big load of writing—and it took time to get it into type after the writing was done. It's good, too; that fellow got what I said and got it right, even though he didn't take more than a handful of notes."

The general manager, an expert in his own work, recognizes quality in another work and has respect for the person able to do that work. Respect, and some awe.

Once they have found him intelligent and capable, businessmen treat the reporter as an equal. If they find him shoddy and slovenly, they scorn him with the full contempt that experts have for anyone who is dismal.

Business and industry, like any works, enjoy putting on a show to impress the outsiders. That is human nature. Doesn't the reporter speak with careful casualness as he shows a visitor through the newspaper plant? Here is a linotype, costing \$4,000 to \$6,000, and obviously one of today's more complicated ma-

chines. The reporter stifles a well-staged yawn as he explains, "We have fifteen of these. Awfully old, some of them; can't begin to keep up with the newer models." To the visitor, any linotype is amazing; to speak superciliously of such a machine is unbelievable. Of course the visitor is impressed. Business and industry do just what the reporter did, and put on a good act.

Harry's first day on the business run was waist-deep in gloom. He didn't know where to go, and when finally he got into someone's office he asked blankly, "What's the news today?" The smiling answer was, "None that I know of." That was Monday. Tuesday was fully as bad. Tuesday night Harry looked at the box score. He had been at bat nine times and had struck out every time. Then he looked at the calendar: March 16. "First quarter of the year done. I'm going to ask somebody how his business for the first quarter this year compares with the first quarter last year. I'll get a story if I have to strangle somebody for it."

Next morning he went to the offices of the Puremilk dairy, largest in the city. "Not much change from one year to another," the general manager discouraged him. "We sell about the same one year as the year before."

Harry had brushed up his interviewing technique and had a dozen questions ready. "Does Vitamin D milk sell better in winter than summer because people use it more to guard against colds?" "Do you get many complaints of milk freezing between the time the man leaves it on the doorstep at 3:00 A.M. and 7:30 when the housewife brings it indoors?" "How many miles a month does one of your trucks travel?" He returned again to his original question, and asked for statistics.

The general manager saw that Harry really was interested in milk; he didn't know that the interest was rooted in desperation. "Anyone who is interested in us is an intelligent person"; that is true all over the world. Harry was so delighted at getting information that the general manager became delighted in giving it. Harry's story was a hodgepodge of straight news and human interest, but it made half a column. Much more important, it made him confident. He had learned that the "captains of

industry" are human. Next day Harry visited a department store.

### NEWS vs. FEATURES

Before long, however, he realized that he couldn't substitute features for straight news. He must learn more about the city's business and industry. The city and the telephone classified directories gave him a list of stories and factories, an amazing list, both in length and in variety. He had never known that the town had a factory that made organs, from massive church instruments to a thirty-two dollar affair for children. He had never known that another plant kept busy on parts for one of the largest automobile manufacturers. He thought that the horse could be found only in the Smithsonian Institution, but the city supports two harness shops. Another shop deals in nothing but babies' equipment. Harry decided that he had more material than he knew what to do with. He analyzed it to see what main news currents it offered. His first findings were these:

1. Sales volume. News hung on this peg always is interesting; when the furniture dealers report that the higher priced dining room sets are outselling the bargain offerings, he has a most cheerful commentary on the city's prosperity.

2. Employment. The Goodspeed and White plant has taken on fifty more men, because a new gadget has sold far better than anyone expected.

3. New business. The Lambert factory is cheerful about its first order from South America. How did that order come about? The Stovall people, who used to make trunks for automobiles, are busy although all the new cars have built-in baggage compartments and hence don't need trunks. What is the story behind Stovall's enterprise in finding something to do when its original business vanished?

4. Finances. Stockholders of Erwin Rod and Reel company received eighty-nine cents dividend per share this year, against seventy-six cents last year. Everyone in the city who owns stock will read this story.

5. Technology. The Massey factory has a new process that clips manufacturing costs. The story may be hard or impos-



sible to obtain, because the Massey executives may fear that it would benefit competitors, but if it can be broken it will be read appreciatively.

6. Personalities. Many executives are gold mines, and so are many wage earners. The career of Henry Frost, a book-keeper at twenty-one and a department store owner at thirty-one, is excellent reading. Night Watchman Ralph Sims's hand-carved ship models may be worth a column. Grandfather, father, and son work for the same company; that story writes itself.

When Harry finished this outlining, he saw that the business beat would be interesting as well as prolific. Then he started studying his field. From the files and from books of local history he worked up "biographies" for as many businesses as possible. From financial reference books, such as Moody's, Poor's, Dun and Bradstreet, he learned the structure of the more prominent of the city's concerns. He had so many notes now that he converted the two lower drawers of his desk into a filing cabinet. He began clipping business stories from the paper.

All these entries he cross-indexed. When the Hotel Chandler changed its name to the Osgood House, he consulted his private morgue and found that the ex-Chandler was now in its sixth name, and that once, when it was the Hotel Ellison, it was the city's most prominent hostelry. What had seemed to be a one-paragraph story drew in so much background that it ran half a column. He found out when the various companies held their annual meetings, and arranged to learn what was done at them. Elliott and Gardiner reported a \$514,000 increase in sales, but a \$73,500 drop in profits. Harry exhumed from his files last year's story and had a fine comparison of the two years' business.

Others in the office joshed him about his index, but Harry kept on elaborating it. He realized that the business run is too big to be remembered; without his files he would be enormously handicapped for background material.

"Can you tell what President Hinckley of the Gas and Electric says when the Cubs drop three straight?" someone asks.

"I might; I know I can tell you when he switched from ten-cent to two-for-a-quarter cigars."

The business run apparently under control, Harry rejoices—

too soon. He is providing a good grist of news, but it comes over commonly from one or two sources. He has established many contacts, but they are too little diversified. For instance, early in his work he came to know two factory executives. They gave him suggestions, or tips, for stories from companies other than their own. But, since they are factory men, their contacts are more with factory men than with any other group. Harry followed their suggestions, and became acquainted with more factory men. He was not developing too many factory contacts, for no reporter ever has too many information sources in any field, but he was not enlarging his acquaintance with stores, banks, and realty firms rapidly enough to keep pace with his growing familiarity with the factory field.

Business affairs channel as deeply as those of any other enterprise, and Harry must be aware consciously of this or he will neglect unintentionally the happenings in channels other than the one in which he first became an expert.

At the banks he can find out the general trend of the community's business and manufacturing, as attested by the readiness or reluctance with which loans are granted. His progress here will be slow, for only when he is completely convinced of Harry's reliability will a banker confirm, let alone volunteer, information about specific business concerns. Convinced at last, a bank executive will say mildly, "There might be something for you at the Harmsworth department store. I've heard that the management is thinking about remodeling the building. Of course, that may be mere rumor." It isn't rumor. The banker knows how solid is the information, because he has approved a loan to the store to finance the remodeling.

The bank is a primary source of information about the plentifulness or tightness of money, and a starting point for news of specific concerns and companies. It is a news fount only after Harry has patiently and slowly won the respect and confidence of the executives. Rarely, if ever, will a banker help Harry unravel an unfavorable story; the banker will not admit that he has heard that the Galen Store plans to go out of business.

Realty offices are an excellent news source, particularly if

Harry works the name of the office into the story. The realty men know of all land sales. A change in the ownership of an office building involves the realty men, who know of the transaction long before it has reached the point where the papers are ready to be signed. Realty men are much more likely to discuss mortgages than are bankers, and many business changes involve mortgages. Harry must expect to obtain from realty men widely diversified information. The purchase of a vacant lot may be the first hint that a factory is to expand, the offer to sell an old storehouse may be the first suggestion that the company owning it is revising its financial structure and is ridding itself of all unproductive properties, and the changing of part of an office building from small to larger suites may be the initial inkling of an important development in the city's commercial complexion.

As with information from the banks, suggestions from realty offices often require confirmation by the persons or companies directly concerned. The realty broker says, truthfully, "I know this is 'in the wind,' but I'm only an agent in the affair; I can't announce it formally. You'll have to see the people themselves to get it verified."

Stores provide news that reveals powerfully the buying attitudes of the public, and thereby is an index to community prosperity. This Christmas, for the first time in six years, merchants find their lower-priced goods are rejected in favor of costlier and more elaborate gifts. That item is a splendid evidence that more persons are working and are confident that their employment will continue. The stores are quick to notice any change in buying habits; the current fashion in furniture begins by the slightest trifle to lose its popularity, and the stores are aware of the fact. Harry hurries over to the smallish furniture manufacturing company on West Railroad Street to find out what changes it plans or already has planned in its products.

The wider his variety of "listening posts," the more thoroughly Harry can cover the business run. In every meaning of the word, Harry is a specialist reporter but he cannot be a narrow specialist. "Business" means for him both commerce, or trade, and manufacturing.

## MEET MORE PEOPLE

Success with the business run is founded upon one principal quality: that of knowing many, many persons. Accordingly, Harry uses every excuse for interviewing a man. Gordon Smith, assistant manager of a dime-to-dollar store, has been advanced to manager. Harry interviews him, and thereby gets his biography and his picture. He made a quarter-column of high-spot biography to go with the better-job story, and ran the picture. The news editor took a bit of persuading, but it was worth the effort. From then on, Harry had a dossier about Gordon Smith and, more important, he had Smith's good will, for no man resents being proclaimed as climbing the ladder. When an insurance agency brought a new man into town, Harry interviewed him, and ran a story about his history and pedigree. His contacts increased rapidly.

Some of the businessmen required strenuous convincing, but when they discovered that their colleagues dared to talk to Harry they softened, though slowly. Harry helped thaw them by meticulous fidelity to three principles: (1) He questioned and requested until he had his information completely verified and understood; (2) He asked the boss rather than an underling for information; (3) He made it unmistakable that he kept confidences.

"Getting things right" is fundamental in developing the business beat. If he boggles a bit of information, he presents the person who gave it to him in a ludicrous fashion. Some figures skidded and Harry wrote of dollar-a-ton coal. If he had checked his arithmetic he would have seen the blunder, but he didn't. Next day the businessman asked him what-the-unmentionable. "A dozen men have asked me what kind of a factory I'm running that can get coal for that price. You 'explained' what we were doing, and you made me look like a liar or a fool." Thereafter Harry asked six times if need be, but he got his facts straight.

The device of asking the executive rather than a subordinate is one that Harry picked up several years earlier. On a vacation trip, he had to cash a check in a strange town. He went to a

bank and pushed his check at the man in the wicket, who said that he had no authority to honor it without an indorsement. Harry retired, melancholy, but that didn't get a new tire for the car. He tried another bank. As he entered, he saw that a man behind a big desk seemed other than busy. Harry asked him to cash the check, and in turn was asked to identify himself. When he did so, the man initialled the check and said, "Take it down to the first window." Harry got his money in twenty seconds. The man behind the desk was the bank president. Giving information is parallel to giving money; only the executives have the authority to do it. Harry may pick up hints from the underlings, but when he wishes to know about a change in policy he goes to the man who makes the policy.

Keeping confidences makes or wrecks a reporter. The businessmen congregate, and if one remarks at lunch that "you can't trust that *Chronicle* reporter," a hundred others know it by night-fall. Harry is extremely thorough; if one man gives him information, "off the record," and another gives the same information, for publication, Harry tells the first man before the story appears, so that there will be no possible chance of that man thinking Harry broke his promise. A reporter known in business circles as a promise-breaker is a reporter headed for the scrapheap.

#### WRITE THEM IN ENGLISH

Many business stories, especially of finances, require translating.

A year ago the company resumed payments upon the cumulative preferred. Because of the four-year lapse, the payments amounted to \$223,500 instead of the normal \$48,750, with the result that common dividends have not yet been voted.

Businessmen will know what this means, but to many other persons it is murky. To translate it will take a little space, but will make the information so much more meaningful that it twice justifies the increased wordage:

A year ago the company resumed paying dividends upon the cumulative, or guaranteed, preferred stock. These dividends must

be paid before dividends can be paid on any other class of stock. They had been omitted for four years, and these omitted payments brought the money owed on this preferred stock to \$223,500. A single year's payment would be \$48,750. Because the skipped dividends on the cumulative preferred had to be made good, the common stock has not yet had a dividend.

Sugar and water? Not so; to Harry and to business people, the original item was clear. Many other readers avoid business news because they believe they cannot comprehend or unravel it. If it is unravelled for them they will follow it. They will read about a local company that has come far enough out of the morass to be thinking again of dividends, but they demand that the story's explanations be complete and generous. The more Harry brought business news into A-B-C language, the more readers he had. During the renewed depression cramps of 1938 and 1939 a number of papers curtailed their stock market and other business news, on the argument that so few readers understood it that it was not worth its cost. Business news written for specialist readers indeed is too expensive; written for the generality of readers, it is worth while. Much better to have fifty businessmen ask "Why does the paper put in these long, needless explanations?" than to have 5,000 readers lament, "I'd like to know what this is all about but I can't make it out."

The Chamber of Commerce is an important port of call on Harry's news cruises. It is the repository of local business statistics. The state department of industries and labor will tell in November what the city's industrial payrolls were in September, but the C. of C. will have those September figures available very early in October. For certain kinds of news, the C. of C. is an excellent tip-off station. Anything that seems to advance the community's prosperity will be told freely, regardless of how small an item it may be. The C. of C. knows, and will tell, that Haskins and Draper have taken on eight more men.

About the opposite news the C. of C. is sphinxlike, or, worse, it talks with a forked tongue. Bradley and Morris have shut their branch factory and the C. of C. officials may spin long, fantastic arguments to show that this closing, which killed eighty

jobs, really didn't hurt the city at all. Other times the C. of C. has a ready explanation for any unfavorable development: over-high taxes. Many times taxes are too steep, but the C. of C. viewpoint is that any tax is too much, regardless of what is done with it. The Chamber of Commerce is entitled to propagate its belief that the city would benefit if the police force were fired, the fire department disbanded, the schools shut, and the parks abandoned, but that belief should be presented for what it is, an argument or propaganda. Because the C. of C. says it, doesn't make it a fact.

The Chamber is operated directly by a hired man with a glamorous title such as Executive Director or Directing Secretary. He has the devil of a job. He is supposed to irradiate sunshine and cheer, and to make the sunshine real. If a factory closes, it's his fault; if an industry hunting a new home chooses another city, he's to blame. If too many discouraging things happen, the Executive Director is prowling for another job. Harry understands why the Executive Director is frantic to hush or to pooh-pooh any unfavorable happening, and why he loads his information with sales talk about "our enterprising city." He isn't a malicious liar; he's only trying to hold his job. Harry makes the necessary allowances and thereby gets along happily with the Executive Director.

Harry avoids the mistake of assuming that the Executive Director is the only news source in the Chamber. Often the Director nurtures interest in the Chamber by having committees of businessmen carry on part of the organization's work. Action to bring new industry to the city is contemplated, and a businessmen's committee is given the work of listing and describing specifically the land and buildings available for concerns that might be induced to come. The more the merchants and businessmen participate directly in the Chamber's work, the more they know what it is doing and what their colleagues are doing. The Chamber always is eager for publicity, and the contact of these men with the organization fosters in them the thesis that news about business is valuable. Thus their connection with the Chamber makes them the readier to discuss their own busi-

nesses. While the Executive Director may remain the greatest single news source, the committee members constitute a collective source of high importance.

### REMEMBER THE LITTLE FELLOW

When Harry was new to the beat, he thought that the big stores and mills were the only ones worth tapping for news. Then he discovered that Simpson and McGuire, with sixteen employees have a nation-wide reputation for the high quality of their gauges. If a manufacturer needs a triply accurate gauge, he asks Simpson and McGuire to make it and is glad to pay twice the price of an ordinary instrument.

Harry discovered also that three or four businessmen know all the gossip, much of it accurately, and are willing to pass it on. Little of their information is usable without further work, but it gives Harry a basis for going to some other executive and asking about "your expanded sales force."

Harry expects one inside track will be gaudy with red stop signals. Executives hesitate to describe new processes, partly for fear of prejudicing their patent applications and partly for fear of informing their competitors. Other times, however, they are completely willing to tell of new or changed methods. The Boston Store has cut down its returned-goods traffic by fifty per cent, the Johnson Trucking Company has doubled its number of miles without an accident, and George Beamish has won his insurance company's prize for the agent making the greatest gain in policies sold in the state during the past six months. "How was it done?" Harry asks, and he will be told.

The metropolitan papers give Harry many tips that he can adapt to local stories. The Interstate Commerce Commission allows the railroads a higher rate on certain perishable foodstuffs, including seafood. Harry, 1,000 miles from the seacoast, knows that one of the city's largest markets is proud of its unfailing supply of oysters and lobsters. "What will the rates mean to you?" he asks the manager, and comes away with one paragraph on the railroad tariffs and six paragraphs about how that market made seafood a profitable part of its business.

"But aren't a lot of these stories free advertising?" asks the



cub. Not at all. If someone falls down an elevator shaft in the Boston Store and breaks his neck, the store gets its name in the paper. Why should it not have its name printed if it institutes an employment-security plan? News need not be bad in order to be free of advertising. Naturally, the Boston Store will have to buy advertising space to announce that it has snipped twenty-five per cent from the prices of rugs, but Harry should be able to distinguish between advertising and news.

Sometimes Harry stays late at the office, grinding out sideline stories. Every occupation has its own magazines and trade journals. Even the morticians have magazines telling how to make their business better. Harry is in an unexcelled position to contribute to these publications. Crawford the Florist rigs a window display with a salmon swimming upstream that attracts so much attention that the sidewalk is blocked. "Mighty ingenious," says Harry, and goes inside to ask the manager how it was done. A florists' journal gives him twenty dollars for a descriptive article and a couple of pictures. Once Harry was offered the city editorship. "Sorry," he told the publisher, "but I can't afford to take it."

## PUBLICITY WRITING

## SIDE MONEY AND SPLIT LOYALTY

CLIFF, THE CUB, is lunching with Jeff, an old-timer. "Minute steak and a side of asparagus," Cliff orders.

"Hum," Jeff drones, "I thought pay day wasn't until two days after tomorrow. How do you do it, kid? I can't."

"Well," Cliff smiles benignly, "I've found a way to make the ghost walk faster. I'm writing publicity on the side, for the prizefights at the Arena. Four dollars a week, not much, but—"

"You can't live on four a week," Jeff breaks in.

"Of course not, but four on top of my salary—"

"There won't be any 'on top of' if the city 'ed.' finds out about it, Cliff."

The cub's mouth gapes. "Why, what's wrong about it?"

Much is wrong about it. The city editor has no objection if Cliff fattens his wallet by writing fiction, or feature articles, or books, or plays, or radio scripts; he may have whatever extracurricular activities he wishes, so long as he avoids unauthorized publicity writing.

Combining publicity with reporting means a divided loyalty. Human nature being as it is, Cliff will work harder to keep the four dollars "velvet" than to do well in his regular position. He will pound out half-covered stories in order to have time to work on a publicity yarn. Worse, sooner or later he must choose directly between his two employers; a story for the newspaper will demand writing things unpalatable to his publicity employer,

and Cliff will be under strong pressure to dilute the news story in order to salvage his publicity job.

Cliff's present publicity will bring him to that choice of loyalties very quickly. The Arena arranges a fight card that even the manager admits offers the "worst bouts in five years." "Whoop it up, Cliff, in that advance story; keep the suckers from seeing what a frost it is." If Cliff drops the glowing adjectives, the Arena manager will get a new publicity man; if Cliff heralds the forthcoming fights as "ferocious" and "sensational," the customers who came because of his say-so will accuse the newspaper of deceiving them about the quality of pugilism currently on sale. Those four dollars look big; Cliff uses all the adjectives and trusts that one fight may surprise everyone by being lively.

Newspapers are more and more demanding that staff members stay out of publicity, so that they will not face the choice of loyalties. Even the sports department, where publicity writing rooted deepest, is spading it up. In the spring of 1939 a number of sports writers lost their newspaper jobs when their publicity work was revealed by a legislative investigation of pugilistic impurities. The prohibition against publicity writing has formed slowly, but now it is general and the few offices still tolerating it gradually are falling into line.

This is not to say that Cliff can do no publicity work, but that he must get the city editor's consent. "My church wants me to be publicity chairman." Likely enough the city editor will permit; the church is a nonprofit organization, its chances of causing a conflict of loyalties are slight, and Cliff is letting the chief know what outside attachments he contemplates. Working on the side for civic rather than for commercial enterprises well may be sanctioned, at least up to a certain point. If he goes beyond that point, usually the place where the enterprise offers Cliff an "honorarium," the city editor's foot comes down.

No unfairness here; the city editor offers Cliff full-time employment, and thereby has a right to demand that Cliff take on no side lines that may consume too much energy or menace his loyalty to the paper. If the Arena's four dollars look better than

the paper's pay envelope, Cliff is welcome to give up the paper's money.

### FULL-TIME PUBLICITY

More than a few news folk have gone into publicity after resigning their newspaper positions. Whether publicity in the long run offers more than does the city room is debatable. The depression of the early 1930's found many publicity men jobless and hungry, while their former colleagues on the newspapers continued to eat regularly. Certainly publicity writing offers no escape from "being bossed." The publicity writer may seem to be his own commander but he is only a buck private. Every executive or half-executive considers it his privilege to tell the publicity man what to do, how to do it, and to berate him if the clippings don't pile high enough on the desk. A traditional difficulty is that the publicity man is expected to get free ads into the paper. He can't do it, but that doesn't prevent some vice presidents from demanding that the seventeen features of the stupendous new model be pounded into the public memory without the bother of paid advertising.

Other publicity jobs, however, are altogether excellent. A man writing for General Electric, as an instance, is under no command to sell G. E. refrigerators or light bulbs. His work is to tell what the company is doing, to present the genuine news that the papers otherwise might miss. When the engineers crack an atom until it gasps, the publicity man tells how it was done, and that is genuine news. When G. E. improves its undeniably altruistic safeguards against unemployment, the publicity man explains the whats and whys, and they too are real news. Of course they are; improvements in an employment policy affecting thousands upon thousands of families meet the test for news quite as much as does a story about two automobiles colliding and killing three persons.

A new and expanding publicity field is that of municipal affairs, particularly the schools. Even small cities are hiring a writer-teacher to explain or interpret the schools to the public. This is work well worthy of consideration, especially by women.

## A NEW KIND OF PUBLICITY

"There's good money in publicity, but who wants to be a space grafter?" Get rid of that notion; it refers to yesteryear's "press agent." He was interested largely or solely in jimmying a free ad into the paper. His ethics, if any, ranked with the quahogs down at the bottom of the ocean. He delighted in conjuring a fake that seemed to be news, rode on page 1 for a week, and finally was revealed as circus or theatrical publicity. A clam digger found an elephant standing forlornly on a Staten Island beach. No one knew whence came Jumbo. The city editors were suspicious, but they couldn't deny Jumbo's reality. Scientists were interviewed, and hundreds of theories were spun to account for Jumbo becoming a suburban New Yorker. Finally it all came out: the circus was coming to town and Jumbo was a "plant," devised by the press agent.

That sort of thing is out of style now. Today's publicity writer is a reporter as truly as is the fellow covering city hall. His beat is his employer's company. That company makes news every day; the publicity reporter tells about it. His calling demands no slinking down dimly lit alleys and no apologies.

Why are publicity writers needed? Merely because so much is happening today that no newspaper can hope to find out for itself all the activities within its area. The job is too large.

Publicity splits into three branches:

1. Space grafting: This is fading. The sooner it dies, the better, for every inch of stolen space means money diverted from the advertising columns which keep the paper going. A reporter who adopts this sort of work indeed should turn up his coat collar so that none of his old friends can recognize him.

2. Propaganda: Bad as propaganda is, it has been made to carry the guilt of many crimes it never committed. This world plods along under two teamsters. One is that of brute force, which means silencing opposition by means of bullets and bayonets. When Mr. Hitler seized Europe's little countries, he was a teamster cracking the whip. The other teamster drives with his voice rather than his whip. He silences opposition by converting it with words and ideas, rather than intimidating it by

force and threat. This is what the oil companies do when a legislature talks of adding another two cents to the gasoline tax. They shoot no one; instead, they deluge the state with arguments that a heavier gasoline levy would be undesirable.

Propaganda is merely the missionary work of influencing opinion by words rather than by machine guns. At its worst, propaganda is multifold better than its alternative. Propaganda has two forms. One is patently undesirable. This is the hidden propaganda, concealing its source, trying to present arguments as if they were facts:

A survey of leading economists reveals that proposals to increase gasoline taxes would fall far short of producing the desired revenue and would throw many persons, now employed at good wages, on the relief rolls.

Who says all this? Where does it come from? No one knows; that it emanates from the oil companies is not disclosed. The other propaganda is open and honest:

The proposal to increase the state gasoline tax from five to seven cents a gallon would cost 1,100 men their jobs, would encourage gasoline bootlegging, and would fail to raise the \$1,250,000 revenue its proponents claim, Henry C. Barber, president of the American Eagle Oil Company, said today.

This tells its parentage; readers can see at once that it is not "fact" but "opinion," and may reject the opinion if they wish.

Working with propaganda of this second sort is entirely honorable. An individual or an organization has complete right to spread its point of view and try to induce the public to accept that attitude. Twenty-five years ago, July Fourth was a day of horror. Each year fireworks killed scores of persons and maimed hundreds of others. Today fireworks are fewer and more carefully used. The change came as the result of long and arduous propaganda. Certainly propaganda can have evil aims and methods; it can also have splendid aims and methods. "Free discussion," a cornerstone of American democracy, must include inevitably "free propaganda." The plight of various foreign nations is due in part to their lack of free propaganda.

3. Public relations: Here is the best publicity work. Ex-

plaining to a community what an organization or company does is socially valuable. This news gives readers a better concept of their community, and it would be unprinted except for the publicity writer.

Surely the city editor bangs fist on desk as he barks, "We don't use one expletive invective line of publicity and we never will." His words are tangled. What he means is, "We don't use space-graft publicity and we don't use masked propaganda." His paper uses and welcomes much other publicity matter. Even some space grafting is welcome, such as that for the annual Red Cross roll call. The Taxpayers' Alliance attack on the proposed sales tax surely is propaganda, but it is news as well and hence is welcome. The announcement that the Hardy Manufacturing Company now guarantees employees fifty weeks work a year is public relations material and welcome.

Any quantity of local news comes from publicity writers, paid or unpaid. The Seventh Church's announcement of visiting preachers during August was written by its assistant pastor, who is also its publicity man. The abstract of the speech made to the Parnassus Club last night was prepared by the publicity chairman. The story on the "summer schools" at the city playgrounds came from the school department's publicity girl. Drop the publicity copy and the newspaper must miss many worthy stories or enormously increase its reporting staff.

#### PLANNED PUBLICITY

Various local enterprises often have the active support of the newspaper, which may lend a reporter to act as publicity writer. The Community Chest and the Red Cross roll calls are examples. Whether he is "on loan" in this fashion or whether he is publicity writer under some other arrangement, the writer follows two guideposts. The first is to remember that he is a reporter, not an advertising writer, and the second is to plan before he writes. The more genuine news he puts into a publicity effort, the better it succeeds. Publicity for the Community Chest is merely "covering the C. C. beat." In every sense of the word, it is honest and genuine reporting. It must be planned or it will fail; the unsuccessful campaign almost always limps because it is "spon-

taneous" instead of organized. A general develops his strategy far in advance of the battle; so does the successful publicity expert.

Planning involves two central considerations: timing, and building to a climax. On these two principles hinges the success of the entire effort. Dished out at random, the stories get in each other's way, very much as the cylinders of an automobile fire in the wrong sequence if the spark-plug wires are rammed into the distributor head hit or miss. Number 1 cylinder and Number 1 story must explode at precisely the right moment or the motor sputters and balks.

A publicity campaign has a long list of "Do" and "Don't" items:

1. One person must be in command. The publicity is centralized under some one director; he, and he alone, releases stories. Unless this is definitely understood and enforced, the publicity writer might as well spend his time crocheting. He organizes a sustained effort, and half a dozen blatherskite volunteers rush to the newspaper office with brainwhirly ideas that throw his entire strategy out of joint. These ambitious volunteers are welcome if they work under the direction of the publicity writer, if they obtain information and produce stories as he commands. But if they are free lances, each with his own notions of what should be done, the campaign is doomed.

Many a publicity effort has been sunk because an unrestrained enthusiast broke a story ten days before it should have been in print, and thereby stole news the publicity chief was holding for his last-day, both-barrels climax.

2. A campaign must be spaced and timed so that each story is interesting: Done at random, whenever the divine afflatus perches on the writer's shoulder, the first and second publicity stories will scintillate and the last four will be as drab as cellar walls.

3. Publicity stories must be news, not puffery: The idea that "we have to have a story today, even though there's nothing to write about" is fatal. If there is no news, don't write. The city editor and the copy-desk crew may have eyes so weak they re-



quire double-strength lenses in their spectacles, but they can spot the empty publicity story while its writer is still outside the office. Here is a psychological item of extreme importance to the publicity writer. The newspaper folk fit him into one of two categories: the chap who keeps silent until he has something to say, or the chap who writes seven stories a week with no news in any of them. The city editor expects a publicity writer will be in the second category, and lists him there until he proves that he should be exempt. To have a reputation as a writer who "always brings in a real story" means a thirty-point headline and a half-column of space; to have the other sort of reputation means that the story will be plopped on the dead spike if there is any possible excuse for impaling it there.

In publicity writing as elsewhere, a good name is to be prized above great riches. The reputation he establishes with his first three or four stories determines whether the publicity writer has the coöperation or the derision of the newspaper folk.

4. Each story must have a new feature: Pressure upon newspaper space is so heavy that the twice-told publicity story has no chance of getting in the paper. "Why, this fellow said the same thing in his yarn last Friday" means that today's writing isn't printed.

5. The shorter a campaign, the better it is likely to be: Six lively, genuine news stories hit harder than a dozen, of which six are weak and listless. Newspaper workers know that a subject must be superlatively interesting if it is to remain a "big story" more than a very few days. Scan the files for a year and see how few protracted stories remained anywhere on page 1, let alone prominently, for as long as a week.

Less than a month after it began, the Second World War was challenged successfully for the lead position, although that war was news for which readers had been "conditioned" for at least seven years. Those first war weeks saw fast-breaking, dramatic news in plethoric quantity—even "epic" is a mild word for the magnificently reckless defense of Warsaw—and yet the war could not remain the lead story for so short a time as a month.

What chance, then, has the annual minstrel show of the local

Lodge of Zebras of holding public interest through a series of thirty-five or forty stories? A fortnight is enough for many campaigns, three weeks ample for all but the most ambitious.

6. Build the campaign to a climax: Here the expert publicity writer shows his quality. The greenhorn breaks out his three strong stories in the first week and has nothing left for the closing days. A campaign aims twice, first to attract interest and then to induce readers to do something about that interest. At first it gets them to thinking, "Say, that Zebra minstrel show is going to be good." Then it tries to get them to thinking, "That Zebra minstrel show will be so good that I'm going to buy a ticket and see it." The campaign with half a dozen dud stories at the end simply cannot pry seventy-five cents or a dollar out of a reader's pocket. The only way to do that is to close with a crackle.

7. Explain the campaign to the city editors but don't ask them for favors: It's a rare week in which the city editor doesn't hear a couple of gushes about how *very* much the Deux Pour Cinq Club just must have *oodles* of space so it can make enough on its rummage sale to square the last treasurer's overdrafts. The appeals are sad and heart-wrenching, and every one of them asks the city editor to make the rummage sale the biggest news of the year. When a new publicity writer appears, the city editor expects that he too will ask for column upon column of page 1 space. The wise publicity writer surprises him by saying, "We'll give you the information; if you can use it, we shall be very happy." The editor has met few publiciteers so reasonable. The sheer shock will get at least a couple of stories into the paper.

8. Avoid overlapping tales: Make each story brand-new. The copy-desk lads have long memories. "Most of this is the same stuff he wrote last week" means that the one bit that is new may seem so tiny that the desk editor won't bother plucking it from the swamp of told-before information.

9. Don't be a space hog: Those who know nothing of publicity beam at the thought of a column-long story; those who do know realize that when he has accepted one long chronicle the city editor is in excellent strategic position to clamp down and say, "You've already had your quota of publicity." Moreover,

the long story is harder to wedge into a tight paper; there may not be a page that can spare twenty inches of space despite the fact that each of three pages might hold a seven-inch story. The short publicity story has much the lower mortality rate.

10. Divide stories so that both morning and evening papers share in the fresh news: Tuesday's story was new for the morning paper and a rewrite for the afternoon; let the next story be new for the afternoon edition and a rewrite for next morning's. If a city editor realizes that his paper always receives an old story, his willingness to give space cools quickly.

11. Treat competing papers scrupulously alike on both stories and pictures: The *Record* and the *Journal* get the same story, and the *Journal* always has the carbon copy. To the *Journal's* city editor that means only one thing: the publicity writer regards his paper as the also-ran. If the writer lacks energy to do a fresh story for each paper, let him alternate the carbons, so that each paper gets its share. The high spot of the campaign is the announcement of the interlocutor for the show, Judge Harvey Lewis of the superior court. The *Record* gets the story on Thursday; the *Journal* knows of it only when the city editor sees the *Record*. On Friday the publicity writer booms into the *Journal* office with the story, "Here you are, here's the big story in our campaign. Put it on page 1, please." This page would need an asbestos insert to record the city editor's appreciative comments.

12. Avoid far-ahead release dates: The publicity writer wandered in to the office on October 4. On the city editor's desk he saw a chunk of copy labeled "Release October 25." Aha, he murmured; the way to get space is to predate a story, thus showing how important it is. Had he looked a little harder he would have seen that the October 25 matter was the text of the governor's speech dedicating the new General Hospital. The President, the governor, and the mayor can predate; what they say is so important that the city editor is willing to do the bookkeeping involved in getting their copy into print at just the right time. He won't do that for lesser news.

"Zebras to Use Guild Hall for Annual Minstrel Show—Release November 18" is the identification of a publicity story arriving

October 28. The city editor stows it into the drawer where go odds and ends such as the road maps from which he planned last year's vacation trip. The next time he notices the November 18 story is about March 10, when he cleans out the drawer in the hope that he will find his last year's income-tax data there. For minor-league news, the far-ahead release date is foolish. A day or so is long enough. Bring in on Wednesday a story to run Friday and the city editor is appreciative for that piece of "early copy," but the wait-three-weeks chronicle is more bother than it is worth.

13. Write facts, even if they are hard to get: The publicity story that is nothing but words has all the world against it. Many an inexperienced publiciteer believes he must impress the city editor with a daily story. The editor is much more impressed by fewer but more substantial writings.

14. Time the stories for days when the paper is large: Monday and Saturday issues are frightfully dubious; they are the tightest in the week, because advertising is slim. The best day is Thursday or Friday, depending which one brings the food ads from the groceries. Tuesday is the best of the week's early days. Bring in the stories very, very early, so that they can be put into type before the real crush of news arrives. For a morning paper, submit the story by 3 o'clock the afternoon before; for an afternoon edition, by 8 in the morning.

15. Put into the first paragraph something the copy editor can use for headline material: That is, something explicit. "Ambitious plans are being made for the annual minstrel show of the Lodge of Zebras, which this year will surpass the previous efforts of the lodge's well-known corps of funsters." Even if he were willing to approve such drivel, the desk editor simply couldn't write a headline from it. Tell him what those plans are and he can build a headline. The story which suggests a headline has an immense advantage; copy editors welcome it much more than they do a yarn for which grinding out a head is agony. They should be so zealous that the grinding doesn't irritate them, but why expect even desk editors to be exempt from the mutations of human nature? The vacuum-cleaner salesman never compels a customer to write out the order for the machine; the salesman

does all that, and the customer's only effort is that of signing his name. Do as the salesman does.

### THERE'S PLENTY OF NEWS

"Merciful days!" protests the verdant publicity writer. "Is it as impossibly hard as all that? I thought you just sat down and wrote." Surely it is hard, but not impossibly so. Ample and genuine news lurks in almost any event which is to be publicized. To prove it, take about as tame an affair as can be found and see how many stories can be written about it if the publiciteer will dredge for facts.

The event is a public supper given by the women of the Ninth Church to help the church building fund. The new church consists of a basement with a waterproofed ceiling. In these crowded quarters all the church functions must take place; no wonder the members are anxious for money with which to put something on top of that basement. Inevitably, an entertainment will follow the supper and, with equal certainty, the affair will fail unless many persons outside the Ninth Church membership attend, for there aren't enough members to make much profit. Mildred is selected as publicity chairman and told that the success of the supper depends upon her. Now let us see how easily she can devise at least a dozen stories:

1. The first announcement: A supper will be served and an entertainment will follow. Here are three or four easy paragraphs, explaining why the Ninth Churchers are so vigorous in their hunt for money.

2. Prominent persons assisting in the plans: If not prominent, at least well known. William Hinckley, assistant city clerk, is a member of the entertainment subcommittee. Because of his position, he is known to hundreds if not thousands of readers. Mrs. Myra Bowen also is on the committee, and Mrs. Bowen is a past matron of the Eastern Star, thereby inevitably a person whose name is known to many. If Mildred defines "prominent" as meaning "known to many" rather than as "famous" she will find several persons who qualify.

3. Selection of committees and of chairmen: The menu com-

mittee, the entertainment committee, the finance committee, and the waitress committee all help to make a story crammed with local names and thereby automatically newsworthy.

4. First plans: Here Mildred is specific. Instead of writing that "elaborate plans are being made," she says, "A spareribs and sauerkraut supper is being planned."

5. Why a spareribs dinner was chosen: The Ninth Church women may include some of the city's best sauerkraut makers, information that will bring diners who otherwise might stay home.

6. The list of chefs: Perhaps masculine readers won't appreciate this story, but the women will. Even in a city of 150,000, the superb cooks are known to their sisters, and the news that Mrs. Lydia Gorman, the best potato baker in the city, and Miss Sylvia Walters, pie-crust expert, are on the list of cooks will be read eagerly.

7. The menu, who arranged it, and how: That there will be a choice of six kinds of pie makes excellent reading. Ask any man.

8. Previous Ninth Church suppers: That famous supper, three evenings before the old church burned, attracted 350 diners. Many of them will read today's story with a recollective interest.

9. Where the food will be obtained: The spareribs may be that very choice kind obtainable only at certain especially fussy places. The quantity of coffee, the number of loaves of bread, the pounds of flour, and the gallons of milk needed for the supper make an impressive total.

10. How the cooking will be done: It will take some big vessels to hold all those spareribs, and the ovens will be taxed to bake so many pies. The story of the necessary organization and arrangement will be read by hundreds of housewives, who know how cluttered a kitchen gets when the refreshments for the bridge club are the least bit elaborate.

11. Who the waitresses and the dishwashers will be: Certainly Mildred can get a sprightly word picture of members of Boy Scout Troop 46 arrayed in aprons, scrubbing plates and dousing coffee cups.

12. Decorations: Each guest will have a place card, an illustration clipped from a magazine. Rounding up 250 harvest pictures is a sizable job. Who did it and how long did it take?

13. What time the servings will be: That they will be at 5:30 and 6:30 is valuable information that will attract an appreciable number of visitors who would stay away if they knew only that supper would be provided "Friday evening."

14. Parking arrangements: The church is on Beechnut Street, with thirty-minute parking, but Police Chief Reardon authorizes unlimited parking for two blocks each side of the church.

15. The entertainment: The Ninth Church has gone in for radio and will have a spelling bee.

16. How the competitors are selected: Five girls from the Young People's Society will oppose five members of the Men's Club. A story with ten local names always will find space.

17. Who the spelling master will be and how he was chosen: Dignified Matthew Archer, history teacher at Central High School, will be in command. Surely there's a chuckle here.

18. Personality sketches: These include some of members of the cooking staff and others of the spelling contestants.

19. Final preparations: Details of arrangements for the cooking, serving, and entertainment that were not used earlier.

20. Recipes: The Ninth Church women may use some family-heirloom recipes that other cooks envy. The specifications for the pumpkin pies came direct from western Massachusetts, where the recipe has been in honored service since the eighteenth century.

If she thinks about it a bit, Mildred can devise still other stories, such as one about ticket sales and table reservations. This is an exceptional church supper? Far from it; it is simply one that Mildred has investigated deeply enough to find out how many facts it offers. She must be a good reporter to uncover the facts, but successful publicity writing is built upon good reporting.

Cliff, the cub, is lunching again with Jeff, the old timer. "You know, Jeff, maybe a good publicity job would be worth going after."

"Of course it would," Jeff agrees. "Only make sure it is a good one."

"Do you think it would be as much fun as regular reporting?"

"Might be. Some of the pub writers I know seem pretty happy."

"And the others?"

"Aren't there out-of-luckers in any kind of work, Cliff?"



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